CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 18, 2024

The Athletic

Every NHL team's biggest question heading into training camp

By The Athletic NHL Staff

When and for how much will restricted free agent goaltender Jeremy Swayman sign with the Bruins? Can Rangers captain Jacob Trouba put the trade rumors behind him? Will Linus Ullmark be the answer in goal the Senators have been waiting for?

This week, The Athletic asked its staff for the biggest question facing each team heading into camp, and those were a few of the enticing storylines we heard about in response.

With training camps opening across the league and preseason games right around the corner, here's what we have our eyes on.

Anaheim Ducks

Will Cam Fowler (or someone else) be traded? Could the Ducks as we know them be the same by the time they open the season in San Jose? Trade winds have blown around them for some time and the recent entry of Fowler into the steady breeze only adds to a persistent storyline around the club. A separation with longtime No. 1 goalie John Gibson has felt inevitable but Gibson's contract and rough statistics in recent seasons have hindered a potential deal. Trade proposals for Trevor Zegras have taken on a life of their own in the hockey sphere. Now it's Fowler, who's entering his 15th season but appears open to a new NHL home. Major trades don't often occur during training camp and it's very possible all three start the season in Anaheim. Perhaps all three will end there. But it feels like change could be in the air. — Eric Stephens

Will the Ducks trade Cam Fowler, what's the possible timing and which teams might be interested?

Boston Bruins

When and for how much will Jeremy Swayman sign? Swayman is without a contract. A summer of negotiating has not gotten the sides close to an agreement. Swayman believes he is one of the league's best goalies. The Bruins share that opinion, but they can point to an indisputable fact: Swayman has never been a No. 1 goalie in the regular season. This could lead to Swayman missing camp time. — Fluto Shinzawa

Shinzawa: Why Jeremy Swayman's megabucks pursuit has to wait

Buffalo Sabres

Can the scoring bounce back? The Sabres didn't add a top-six forward this summer, instead banking on bounce-back seasons from Tage Thompson, Alex Tuch and Dylan Cozens along with continued growth from players like JJ Peterka and Jack Quinn. General manager Kevyn Adams is betting an improved fourth line and Lindy Ruff's coaching will be enough to get the Sabres back closer to the offensive team they were in 2022-23. — Matthew Fairburn

Will Sabres use their cap space? How much will Devon Levi play? 6 lingering questions

Calgary Flames

How good is the Flames' youth movement? The Flames enter the season as underdogs, but their veterans shouldn't be the sole focus. Can Connor Zary and Martin Pospisil take a step forward? Dustin Wolf will get his chance to compete for NHL time: how will he fare? Can Matthew Coronato carve out a spot for himself? Does Jakob Pelletier still have a future with the Flames? Which other Flames youngsters will see time with the big club this season? If the Flames are in the business of selling hope, this season will play a role in how excited fans should be for their future. — Julian McKenzie

What does Craig Conroy need to achieve this season? Flames mailbag

Is it time for Carolina to give Pyotr Kochetkov the reins in net? (Jared C. Tilton / Getty Images)

Carolina Hurricanes

Who is the No. 1 goalie? Plenty thought Frederik Andersen wouldn't be back with the Hurricanes after he unraveled in the Game 6 loss to the Rangers that ended the Hurricanes' season in May. But Carolina — led by new GM Eric Tulsky — decided to stand pat with its goaltenders, keeping Andersen, Pyotr Kochetkov and Spencer Martin as the team's three goalies. Kochetkov made a team-high 40 starts last season with Andersen on injured reserve, but it was Andersen who took the net in the postseason. Can Andersen, 35 at the start of the regular season, carry the load this year, or is it finally time to give Kochetkov the reins for good? — Cory Lavalette

Chicago Blackhawks

Other than Connor Bedard, how many young players will actually make the Blackhawks roster out of camp? The Blackhawks drastically changed the look of their NHL roster by adding eight veterans this offseason. Those additions likely mean most of the Blackhawks' younger players are at least starting their season in the AHL. From Artyom Levshunov to Kevin Korchinski to Frank Nazar, the Rockford IceHogs, the Blackhawks' AHL affiliate, could have a packed roster of promising prospects. — Scott Powers

What I'm hearing about the Blackhawks: Loaded AHL roster, much more

Colorado Avalanche

How healthy will they be up front? The biggest question facing the Avalanche entering training camp is the health of their talented forward group. Colorado coach Jared Bednar said he hopes Gabriel Landeskog, who hasn't played since 2022, will be ready to play sometime near the start of the season, and Artturi Lehkonen won't be a full participant to start camp following offseason shoulder surgery. That could open opportunities for other forwards to push their way up the lineup with impressive performances. Wingers Miles Wood, Logan O'Connor and Joel Kiviranta have a lot to gain from a great camp. — Jesse Granger

Columbus Blue Jackets

How can they live with the grief of Johnny Gaudreau's death? The sudden, senseless tragedy that took the lives of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau has cast a pall on the organization, and it's not one that will be lifted soon. Forget about hockey and how impossible it will be to replace Johnny Gaudreau on the ice. The Blue Jackets will be challenged to focus and prepare for the season without their beloved teammate. Every player will handle grief in their own way, but this will not be easy. — Aaron Portzline

Gaudreau's teammates share their 'anger, sadness, disbelief'

Dallas Stars

Will the real Jake Oettinger please stand up? Dallas addressed its most pressing concern on Tuesday by signing RFA defenseman Thomas Harley to a two-year bridge deal. The Stars have plenty of veterans — Jamie Benn, Tyler Seguin, Matt Duchene — to ease the blow of Joe Pavelski's retirement, and they have dynamic young stars ready to take on larger roles in Wyatt Johnston, Logan Stankoven, Mavrik Bourque and Harley. But as deep and as talented as Dallas is, none of it might matter if Oettinger doesn't return to form in goal. Oettinger's save percentage plummeted from .919 to .905 last season, his goals saved above expected dropped from 21.65 to 1.46 (51st in the league), and he was rather pedestrian by his lofty standards in the Western Conference final against Edmonton. Given his pedigree and his track record, it's likely more a blip than a trend. But Oettinger enters the 2024-25 campaign with something to prove. — Mark Lazerus

Detroit Red Wings

Is the team's defense improved? The Red Wings lost a lot of production this offseason, and while they'll hope to replace that scoring with contributions from Vladimir Tarasenko and via internal improvements, their bigger short-term priority will be defending better as a team. Detroit gave up the league's ninth most goals per game last season (3.33), and too often gave away easy scoring chances via turnovers and defensive breakdowns. They'll certainly hope the full-time arrival of Simon Edvinsson can help on the blue line thanks to his length and mobility, but a big part of the equation will need to come from their forwards, who last season tended to be more offensively tilted. Tyler Motte will help there as a matchup forward who can kill penalties, and Christian Fischer will return in a similar role. From there, it's about getting a little more responsibility out of some of the more skilled forwards, a task which will fall to Derek Lalonde and his staff to execute. — Max Bultman

Edmonton Oilers

Can the Oilers get by at right defense? There are options aplenty on the starboard side of the blue line after Evan Bouchard, but there's also tons of uncertainty. The Oilers lost Vincent Desharnais to free agency, Philip Broberg to an offer sheet and traded Cody Ceci, so turnover is high. Josh Brown was signed, depth contributor Troy Stecher was retained and Ty Emberson was the return for Ceci — but none of these guys are surefire top-four defensemen. Neither is lefty Travis Dermott, who's at camp on a tryout and can play the right side. This is unquestionably the biggest concern with the roster. It might have to be addressed quickly if issues are apparent early in the season. — Daniel Nugent-Bowman

Florida Panthers

Who's up next on defense? We're trying not to use the term "Cup hangover" here, and it's difficult. The Panthers — like nearly all champions — experienced attrition over the summer, particularly on the blue line, where key contributors Brandon Montour and Oliver Ekman-Larsson both signed for more money and years than Florida could offer. Paul Maurice has faced uncertainty at the position before, including at the start of last season. His task this time is figuring out how much he can rely on additions Nate Schmidt and Adam Boqvist. — Sean Gentille

Los Angeles Kings

Can they replace Matt Roy on the blue line? The Kings saw Roy, their homegrown defenseman from the seventh round in 2015, cash in with Washington to the tune of six years and $34.5 million while opting not to directly replace him either through trade or free agency. They signed Joel Edmundson and dealt for Kyle Burroughs but neither fills that hole on the right side in L.A.'s second pairing. But they also know 21-year-old Brandt Clarke is set to make the jump to the NHL for good. Clarke figures to get plenty of opportunities to stick and Jordan Spence could also be bumped up in the lineup, but the Kings will have a problem if they can't replace Roy's sound defense, penalty killing and ability to eat a lot of five-on-five minutes against other teams' better forwards. — Eric Stephens

'I want more out of myself': Brandt Clarke won't be satisfied by simply making Kings' roster

Minnesota Wild

Will the Wild carry three goalies? After re-signing Marc-André Fleury for what he says will be his 21st and final season, the Wild tried all offseason to trade Filip Gustavsson — including making him part of their recent attempt for Patrik Laine. No trade transpired yet, but the Wild still want to get 2021 first-round pick Jesper Wallstedt more NHL games than the three he got last year. So as general manager Bill Guerin has said, this could be a "hybrid" season where the Wild carry three goalies often. For a team that can't currently afford two league-minimum extra players, Wallstedt's $925,000 cap hit will demand roster and cap gymnastics. — Michael Russo

How should Wild handle Marc-Andre Fleury's swan song? Ex-NHL goalies on 3-man rotations, playing at 40

Coming out of training camp last year, Kirby Dach looked like the Canadiens' best forward. (David Kirouac / USA Today)

Montreal Canadiens

Can Kirby Dach pick up where he left off? Coming out of training camp last year, Kirby Dach looked like the Canadiens' best forward. Then his season was over after two games. In two years in Montreal, Dach has played a total of 60 games. Over the second half of 2022-23 and in last year's training camp, he looked like a difference-maker with the potential to form a very good 1-2 punch down the middle with Nick Suzuki. There is not much depth at center behind those two in the organization. The Canadiens need Dach to be that impact player; it is critical to their rebuild. — Arpon Basu

Nashville Predators

How will the Preds deploy their new stars? That's more of a topic with the forwards because it seems obvious Brady Skjei will be paired with Roman Josi. But the questions for Andrew Brunette are the extent to which he wants to keep last year's superb top line — Filip Forsberg, Ryan O'Reilly, Gustav Nyquist — together, and the center of choice for Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault if that desire is high. Tommy Novak is the logical choice, but that would mean separating him from Luke Evangelista. Regardless, there are new stars, and Nashville is excited. — Joe Rexrode

New Jersey Devils

How do the new pieces fit in? Tom Fitzgerald had as active an offseason as any general manager. The roster looks capable of contending for the playoffs, assuming the new players gel under new coach Sheldon Keefe. Jacob Markström, Brenden Dillon, Brett Pesce, Stefan Noesen and Tomáš Tatar will all help the team, but there will be an adjustment period. That's worth watching during training camp. — Peter Baugh

New York Islanders

Did they do enough to be competitive? Lou Lamoriello didn't do anything drastic to a roster that sneaked into the playoffs for a second straight year and slunk away after a first-round loss. Anthony Duclair was the lone NHL free-agent addition. Lamoriello is banking on a full season of Patrick Roy behind the bench to give the Isles enough juice early in the season, but the continuity on this roster might just be wearing too thin. — Arthur Staple

New York Rangers

Where does the Jacob Trouba situation stand? After being in trade talks during the offseason, Trouba will naturally be a storyline heading into camp. He knows the drill, though, and already showed in his early comments that he'll handle everything professionally. His fit on the ice will also be interesting. Assuming Adam Fox and Ryan Lindgren are a pair, will Peter Laviolette start K'Andre Miller and Braden Schneider together and put Trouba on the third pair? He tried that out in the playoffs, and it'll be an option in camp. — Peter BaughJacob Trouba Q&A: On trade rumors, the upcoming season and his first art exhibit

Ottawa Senators

Is Linus Ullmark the answer in goal? A year ago, the Senators thought Joonas Korpisalo might answer their goaltending questions after they signed him as a free agent but unhappily, it didn't work out. Korpisalo's numbers (a 3.27 GAA and an .890 save percentage) were the worst in the league among the 15 goalies who played 3,000 minutes or more last season. But Ullmark, acquired from Boston, won the Vezina Trophy as the league's top goalie as recently as 2023 and thrived in a regular-season timeshare with Jeremy Swayman. If the Senators tighten up defensively under new coach Travis Green, see continued growth among their young players and get the sort of reliable netminding Ullmark provided in his three years with the Bruins, then the Senators should finally contend for a playoff spot after missing the postseason for the last seven years. — Eric Duhatschek

Philadelphia Flyers

Who will skate with Matvei Michkov? The unexpected, early arrival of the talented rookie winger gives coach John Tortorella a much-needed weapon in the top six, particularly after the Flyers' biggest issue last season was a lack of elite-level talent. Does Tortorella stick Michkov with captain Sean Couturier, a former Selke Trophy winner who faded down the stretch last season? Or might it be Morgan Frost, a creative player in his own right when he's on his game? Surely there will be some experimentation over the next few weeks, but it will be intriguing to monitor. — Kevin Kurz

Matvei Michkov dazzles in Flyers rookie game: 'He's got that swag to him'

Pittsburgh Penguins

Can David Quinn fix the power play? All those Hall of Famers, and all that futility. A power play that included Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Erik Karlsson, Kris Letang and Jake Guentzel (for most of the season) finished 31st out of 32 teams and led the league in most short-handed goals allowed. New assistant coach David Quinn is in charge of the power play moving forward. Can he fix it? The season will likely depend on it for the Penguins, who would have easily qualified for the postseason had their power play been even average. — Josh Yohe

San Jose Sharks

How much better will the Sharks be? Last year was a nightmare somewhat by design. Macklin Celebrini was going to be the no-doubt No. 1 pick of the NHL Draft, and the Sharks plowed through a dreadful NHL-worst season where they had only 47 points. But they had the best draft lottery odds, and a win there netted them Celebrini. Mission accomplished. General manager Mike Grier then had a busy summer trying to upgrade the talent level around their new franchise center. Veteran additions such as Tyler Toffoli, Jake Walman, Barclay Goodrow and Alex Wennberg should make them more competitive. Toffoli, in particular, is a proven sniper who could be on Celebrini's wing. The defense could still be leaky, though Cody Ceci gives them an upgrade. The stunning late summer trade for top goalie prospect Yaroslav Askarov and 2023 No. 4 pick Will Smith provide further hope for the future. The Sharks won't make the playoffs, but they shouldn't be as big of a tire fire in 2024-25. — Eric Stephens

'Second to none': How did Macklin Celebrini's Sharks rookie-game teammates assess him?

Seattle Kraken

Will Matty Beniers bounce back? Matty Beniers' rookie season was electric. The Kraken center looked like a burgeoning superstar, played with incredible swagger and led the team to a stunning run through to the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. Beniers' sophomore campaign,

however, was a reminder that development isn't always linear. Even for potentially elite young players. Last season Beniers' shooting luck ran cold and the joyful assertiveness in his game appeared to disappear. After racking up 24 goals and 57 points as a first-year pivot, Beniers' production sagged to 15 goals and 37 points in 77 games last season. The Kraken don't have enough offense or enough elite players to overcome another good but not great season from Beniers. If he can bounce back, however, the Kraken could get back into the playoff mix in the Pacific Division. — Thomas Drance

St. Louis Blues

Who will be the No. 2 center? The Blues expect Robert Thomas, who is signed through 2030-31, to be their No. 1 center for the long-term future. But who's their No. 2? Brayden Schenn has filled the role in the past, and the Blues have experimented with Pavel Buchnevich there for the past two seasons. Dalibor Dvorský, the No. 10 pick in the 2023 draft, will likely have the job one day. But for the 2024-25 season, the big question: Will it be old reliable (Schenn), the alternative (Buchnevich) or the prospect (Dvorský)? — Jeremy Rutherford

Tampa Bay Lightning

Can the Lightning extend their window? We have quite a few questions for Tampa Bay. Can Ryan McDonagh stabilize the blue line? Will the team miss Mikhail Sergachev? What will life look like without Steven Stamkos? How will Jake Guentzel fit? Is there enough depth scoring? And will Andrei Vasilevskiy bounce back? But there is one overarching theme that runs through each of those questions, and that revolves around the Lightning's window of contention. The big question is whether a busy offseason will be enough to give this core another championship run after two consecutive Round 1 exits. — Shayna Goldman

Toronto Maple Leafs

Can Easton Cowan force his way into the Leafs? You could go in a few different directions here — what's life like with Craig Berube as coach, for instance? Why Cowan? He's the team's top prospect, he's 19, he's coming off a huge year in junior, and he's got a chance to actually make the team. The Leafs do have a number of forwards competing for jobs — including Nick Robertson, Ryan Reaves and Connor Dewar — so there are obstacles in Cowan's way. But if he looks like he might just be ready for the NHL, with his unique skill set, Leafs management will be inclined to give him a look in the regular season — if only because Cowan will have to return to juniors if he's not playing in the NHL. — Jonas Siegel

Utah Hockey Club

Will aggressive new ownership translate into a playoff spot? No team underwent a greater offseason makeover than Utah HC. They relocated to Salt Lake City from Arizona, are back playing in an NHL-size building and made three important offseason acquisitions — Mikhail Sergachev from Tampa Bay, John Marino from New Jersey and Ian Cole as a UFA — to bolster the back end of a young but improving squad. More than anything else, however, there is a new attitude and level of excitement under the ownership of Ryan Smith. Instead of just trying to survive under flailing ownership, playing in an undersized college arena, there's a collective feeling among players and staff that they are back in the big leagues. That development — plus better overall talent — should provide the environment for a bump in on-ice performance. — Eric Duhatschek

Vancouver Canucks

What's the status of Thatcher Demko? The Vancouver Canucks won the only playoff game Thatcher Demko started last season. The Vezina nominee goaltender, a core piece for this team, sustained a knee injury late in the 2023-24 regular season. He worked his way back and returned for two regular season games and Game 1 of the postseason, only to suffer another knee injury late in that fateful postseason contest. By all indications, Demko was close to returning before the Canucks were eliminated by the Edmonton Oilers in Game 7 of the second round, but there's uncertainty around his status and timeline for training camp — and even perhaps the start of the regular season. The club is hopeful Demko will be back in the blue paint for opening night and Canucks fans will be too. — Thomas Drance

Vegas Golden Knights

Who will replace the scoring lost to free agency this summer? The Golden Knights lost 35.7 percent of the goals scored last season through trades or free agency this summer. The franchise's all-time goal leader Jonathan Marchessault makes up the majority of that, but they'll also be looking to replace Chandler Stephenson, William Carrier, Michael Amadio and Paul Cotter up front. Vegas brought in former first-round pick Alexander Holtz, and three-time 20-goal scorer Victor Olofsson to supplement the scoring, and hope 2020 first-round pick Brendan Brisson takes a step in his development. The biggest storyline for Vegas' camp will be which forwards can grab ahold of big top-six opportunities. — Jesse Granger

Washington Capitals

What's the plan for the new guys? Over the summer, the Caps added (among others) top-six forwards Pierre-Luc Dubois and Andrew Mangiapane, top-pair defenseman Jakob Chychrun and goaltender Logan Thompson. That's nothing to sneeze at for any team, let alone one that made the playoffs last season. They were also utterly necessary moves, given Washington's underlying numbers in 2023-24. It'll be particularly interesting to see whether Dubois (a center) and Mangiapane (a right-winger) play on a line together and how much of a look each gets with Alex Ovechkin. — Sean Gentille

Winnipeg Jets

If 110 points is too much to ask for, how about a playoff round? Training camp does present Winnipeg with important questions. Can Brad Lambert make the team? What does Cole Perfetti's next step look like? Who plays second-line center, how does the new Jets coaching staff revamp Winnipeg's special teams, is this Nikolaj Ehlers' last season as a Jet, and what can Gabriel Vilardi accomplish in year two? The answers are important and the details will shape Winnipeg's future. No specific element matters more than the Jets' playoff aspirations — qualify, win a game, and then follow through by winning a round for the first time since there was a North Division. — Murat Ates

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Takeaways From The 2024 Prospects Showcase

By Walt Ruff

RALEIGH, N.C. - With three games in four days in the rear-view mirror, the Carolina Hurricanes prospects had a good showing during this past weekend's event just outside of Nashville.

Going 2-1 with victories over the Tampa Bay Lightning and Florida Panthers, here are some storylines that either developed or evolved heading into the team's training camp later this week.

The Door Is Open...

A loose penciling of a projected lineup for October 11's opening night, combined with General Manager Eric Tulsky's comments earlier this summer, provide the impression that one of the young forwards playing in this past weekend's event could have a real opportunity to play with the big boys this season.

A lot of eyes gravitated toward 2023 first round pick Bradly Nadeau, Hobey Baker Award finalist Jackson Blake, and last year's training camp darling, Felix Unger Sorum.

All three performed well at the event, showcasing (pun intended) what makes each of them successful.

Nadeau has fantastic vision and a beautiful shot, Blake can make captivating things happen when the puck is on his stick, and Unger Sorum possesses the patience of someone much more experienced than his actual age of 19.

Each will be a player to keep an eye on over the next few weeks.

"Part of what we are doing at this point is making sure (our younger guys) have an opportunity to step into bigger roles. We have some young players in the NHL who are ready to grow. We have some players who are just a little bit away from the NHL who are ready to step into NHL roles. Seeing them continue to take steps forward is a big part of how we keep this going. Leaving them the opportunity is part of the job here. Ultimately, it's a balancing act. We aren't in a rebuild. We aren't turning things over completely to the kids. But we do need to leave room for them to keep growing and keep assuming newer and bigger roles." - Canes General Manager Eric Tulsky

Gleb!

There's always one player at this event each year who leaves with more attention than he had going into the event, and this year it's Gleb Trikozov.

The team's first pick at the 2022 draft had a hat trick in the third period on Saturday and then continued his goal-scoring on Monday.

While his skating appears raw, he does not lack confidence and will fire each time he's presented with an opportunity. The upcoming season will be his first in North America and he'll be a name for fans to keep an eye on in the years ahead.

"He knows his way around the net and has a great ability to shoot pucks. Both of those are high-end things in his game. I think he's getting used to how we want to play with and without the puck, and that's important for him because it's a much different style of play [than he's played in the past]. His size, his strength, his ability to hold onto pucks, and his ability to make plays were all things that we were able to see in these past three games." - Canes Associate General Manager Darren Yorke

Bright Future On The Blue Line

The Canes had seven signed defensemen play at the event, signaling a stockpile of depth at the position.

In terms of being the most pro-ready, the conversation starts with spring signee Scott Morrow. The 2021 second round pick is responsible defensively and looked right at home quarterbacking the prospects' first power play unit. Chipping in with an unofficial five points in three games, there's no concern regarding his ability to contribute offensively.

The most likely scenario for Ronan Seeley and Domenick Fensore is another season in Chicago (AHL) and another name that could be joining them is Charles-Alexis Legault.

Listed at 6-foot-3, 208 lbs. - with an updated and likely much larger height and weight expected to come from the onset of training camp - Legault has a pro-ready physical frame right now. With some strong puck skills as well, Legault also appears to have an interest in dropping the gloves too, something he engaged in on Saturday.

"He's very mature in his approach. He's business-like but also has a positive energy and nice qualities as a leader as well. He stands up for his teammates and he stands up for how we need to play. He's excited about getting better every day and learning how to be a professional. I was impressed with a lot of players on our team, including Charles. His maturity is something that is going to benefit us." - Chicago Wolves Head Coach Cam Abbott

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Gunler Aims to Bounce Back from Injuries

By Walt Ruff

RALEIGH, N.C. - The last few years for Noel Gunler have been a roller coaster, to say the least.

Selected in the second round of the 2020 draft by Carolina, the skilled forward was signed to an entry-level contract in March 2022.

Coming to North America right away and immediately playing in 21 games (regular season + postseason) with the Chicago Wolves, he was a member of the Calder Cup-winning group.

But things went sideways the following year.

Playing in just 31 games for the Wolves, Gunler dealt with injuries that prohibited him from getting to the level of offensive production that his game had become synonymous with.

After surgery cut his season short, the injury bug continued to bite him while he played in Finland for the 2023-24 campaign. Dressing for Karpat, he was only able to skate in 24 games before going under the knife once again.

"It's been really tough. For the last year and a half, I haven't played hockey without anything bothering me," Gunler said on Monday. "It's been tough, mentally."

Now with a full offseason to reset, Gunler is coming to Canes training camp 100% healthy and with a refreshed outlook.

"[The past health issues] are something that I've moved on from and I'm just trying to learn from it. I just want to enjoy being back playing," he said with a smile, after wrapping up a successful Prospects Showcase.

A critical part of the team's two victories, Gunler, born in Luleå, Sweden, unofficially finished tied for the team lead with five points. More importantly, both he and Canes' management believed that he played the way that he needs to play to be successful.

"The biggest thing for him, and he showed it this weekend, is that he needs to be hard to play against every single game. His ability to get in on the forecheck and recover pucks was impressive" Canes Associate General Manager Darren Yorke offered. "Him being harder to play against will allow him to have more opportunities offensively because of that strong forechecking ability."

In addition to being tough to play against and a relentless forechecker, Gunler, a restricted free agent at the end of the season, believes he can merge that with his strong suits to find success, despite the turbulent past 18 months.

"My ability to find space in the offensive zone is probably [my best asset] and I like to think I have a great shot," Gunler self-reviewed. "I think I have good speed and vision. I can put myself in a good position to do good things offensively, and get back in a good position defensively."

If he can put it all together, Canes' brass believes that the prospect's future is as bright as it's ever been.

"He's taken some of the advice, listened to what we've asked him to do and he's showed that that's what he wants," Yorke continued. "This tournament he showed some growth with some of those development things that we've mentioned to him."

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Hurricanes season preview: Gostisbehere, Walker bring new look on defense

By Tom Gulitti

The 2024-25 NHL season starts Oct. 4. With training camps underway, NHL.com is taking a look at the three keys, the inside scoop on roster questions, and the projected lineup for each of the 32 teams. Today, the Carolina Hurricanes.

Coach: Rod Brind'Amour (seventh season)

Last season: 52-23-7; second place in Metropolitan Division, lost to New York Rangers in Eastern Conference Second Round

3 KEYS

1. Forward depth

The Hurricanes have some holes to fill after losing forwards Jake Guentzel (signed with Tampa Bay Lightning), Teuvo Teravainen (signed with Chicago Blackhawks), Stefan Noesen (New Jersey Devils) and Evgeny Kuznetsov (mutually terminated contract). But the departures created opportunities for returnees Jack Drury and Jesperi Kotkaniemi to play bigger roles as well as newcomers such as William Carrier (signed six-year contract), Jack Roslovic (one-year contract) and Tyson Jost (one-year contract) and 19-year-old rookie Bradly Nadeau.

"We lost some good players," general manager Eric Tulsky said. "There's no doubt that creates some headwind, but we have a lot of good players coming in and a lot of young players who are getting better."

2. Reconfigured defense

Carolina will similarly have to piece together its defense after losing its second pair of Brett Pesce (signed with Devils) and Brady Skjei (Nashville Predators). Fortunately, Dmitry Orlov, a top-four defenseman with the Washington Capitals before signing with the Hurricanes in 2023, was already in place to move up from playing on the third pair last season. With the top pair of Jaccob Slavin and Brent Burns intact, the Hurricanes will need to find the right fits on their bottom two pairs for returnee Jalen Chatfield and offseason additions Sean Walker (signed five-year contract) and Shayne Gostisbehere (three-year contract) with 21-year-old rookie Scott Morrow possibly competing for a job.

3. Goaltending stability

With some potential adjustment time required for the new defense pairs, goalies Pyotr Kochetkov (23-13-4, 2.33 goals-against average, .911 save percentage, four shutouts in 42 regular-season games) and Frederik Andersen (13-2-0, 1.84 GAA, .932 save percentage, three shutouts in 16 regular-season games) might be busier initially than last season when Carolina allowed an NHL-low 25.6 shots on goal per game. Andersen staying healthy after the 34-year-old missed four months last season with a blood-clotting issue would help, but the Hurricanes have a safety net with Spencer Martin also under contract.

Breaking down Martin Necas re-signing with the Hurricanes for two years

ROSTER RUNDOWN

Making the cut

Nadeau, Jackson Blake, 21, and Felix Unger Sorum, 19, will be part of the forward competition during training camp and the preseason, but they might need some seasoning with Chicago in the American Hockey League. Nadeau, who led Maine with 46 points (19 goals, 27 assists) in 37 games last season, and Blake, who led North Dakota with 60 points (22 goals, 38 assists) in 40 games, each played one NHL game at the end of last season and will likely play for Carolina at some point this season. Unger Sorum, who had 15 points (three goals 12 assists) in 35 games with Leksands in the Swedish Hockey League last season, probably needs some time to adjust in his first season in North America.

"I think we are going to have a healthy competition in training camp," Tulsky said. "I think there is a very real possibility that one or more rookies make the team out of camp."

Most intriguing addition

Gostisbehere should fit in seamlessly and could help Carolina's power play after he had 29 power-play points (two goals, 27 assists) and 56 total points (10 goals, 46 assists) in 81 games with the Detroit Red Wings last season. The 31-year-old is already familiar with how the Hurricanes play; he had 10 points (three goals, seven assists) in 23 games with Carolina at the end of the 2022-23 regular season and three assists in 15 playoff games to help them reach the Eastern Conference Final before losing to the Florida Panthers.

Biggest potential surprise

Drury had 27 points (eight goals, 19 assists) in 74 regular-season games last season with the Hurricanes while averaging 12:17 of ice time. The opportunity to play more and in a more offensive role could lead to a breakout season. The 24-year-old showed he can produce more in the AHL in 2021-22, when he had 52 points (20 goals, 32 assists) in 68 regular-season games and 24 points (nine goals, 15 assists) in 18 playoff games to help Chicago win the Calder Cup.

Ready to contribute

Morrow could probably step into the lineup this season and not look out of place but will have to beat out a veteran to play regularly. The 21-year-old got plenty of collegiate experience playing three years at the University Massachusetts, where he had a team-leading 30 points (six

goals, 24 assists) in 37 games as a junior last season before turning pro and playing his first two NHL games.

Fantasy sleeper

Gostisbehere, D (average draft position: 155.6) -- He led Red Wings defensemen in points last season, 14 more than Moritz Seider (42 points in 82 games), who was second. Gostisbehere tied for 13th among NHL defensemen in points was seventh in power-play points. He could compete with Burns for first power-play usage and bring exposure to high-scoring forwards Sebastian Aho, Seth Jarvis, Andrei Svechnikov and Martin Necas. -- Pete Jensen

ESPN

Burning preseason questions for all 32 NHL teams

By Ryan S. Clark and Kristen Shilton

It has been about three months since the Florida Panthers won the Stanley Cup, the 2024 NHL draft was held at the Sphere, and hundreds of players found new homes via free agency.

But as autumn quickly approaches, so too do the NHL preseason and training camps for all 32 teams ahead of opening night on Oct. 8.

To help get you ready for the next few weeks -- as teams decide on which players make the roster, and how their lines, D pairings and goalie tandems will shake out -- here are the biggest lingering questions for each club, courtesy of Ryan S. Clark (Western Conference) and Kristen Shilton (Eastern Conference).

Atlantic Division

Boston Bruins

How will the Bruins reshape their top six?

Yes, there is also the question of whether restricted free agent Jeremy Swayman will have a new deal in place to officially take the mantle as Boston's No. 1 goaltender. But that financial stickiness is, as B's captain Brad Marchand said, "part of the business."

The job for Bruins coach Jim Montgomery going into camp is figuring out how to revamp the offense. The Bruins finally landed top center Elias Lindholm in free agency while losing winger Jake DeBrusk to Vancouver. So who will step in to fill that void on the wing? Boston has a prized prospect in Fabian Lysell to keep an eye on, and a formerly bottom-six skater like Morgan Geekie could push for an expanded role.

Lysell is the real one to watch, though. Boston held him out of rookie camp so he would be "extremely ready" for the team's main event. In other words, the Bruins expect he's ready to snag an NHL roster spot for opening night. We'll see if that's the case.

Buffalo Sabres

Was Buffalo right to stand pat offensively?

The Sabres' inactivity in free agency was a head-scratcher. Buffalo didn't add a single notable asset, and it bought out veteran Jeff Skinner's contract to, quite possibly, make them worse up front than they were a season ago.

How will new coach Lindy Ruff piece his forward lines together now? If Jack Quinn can come back strong from an injury-shortened 2023-24 campaign, that would be a huge boost and give Buffalo a potential top-line partner for Alex Tuch and Tage Thompson. A rebounded Dylan Cozens to go with JJ Peterka would also improve the Sabres' prospects.

It remains to be seen though whether Buffalo will suffer from a lack of new talent. GM Kevyn Allen might be able to tell quickly in camp if he was right to bet on Buffalo's incumbents.

Detroit Red Wings

What -- or who -- will be the difference-maker?

The Red Wings have been missing ... something. Despite good talent, a solid structure and, at times, long stretches of momentum last season, Detroit managed to fall just short when it mattered most. How will the Red Wings go about fixing that?

It starts with training camp. Detroit is expecting growth from its young players like Simon Edvinsson, Jonatan Berggren and Carter Mazur. Patrick Kane and Vladimir Tarasenko will need to play key roles as veterans on and off the ice. And other returning stars -- led by captain Dylan Larkin -- have to be better, too.

On the back end, the Red Wings could be minus one significant skater in Moritz Seider. He doesn't have a contract yet (fellow RFA Lucas Raymond signed his new deal on Monday night), and that's a potential distraction the Red Wings can't afford to let derail their progress. Coach Derek Lalonde has enough to sort through as it is identifying how to get Detroit back into the postseason picture.

Florida Panthers

Will two short summers catch up to Panthers?

Florida lost in the Stanley Cup Final two years ago -- only to make up for it with a thrilling Game 7 victory over Edmonton in June to secure the franchise's first championship. That elation bled into a busy -- and decidedly brief -- summer of Cup parties and events that have no doubt kept players from their usual offseason routines. Does that come back to bite Florida as it gets set to defend its title?

While the Panthers used losing to Vegas in 2023 as motivation for redemption the following year, Florida was

able to bask in Cup-winning glory the past two months. Certainly no player will be resting on his laurels come training camp, but that is where the first indications of fatigue -- mental or physical -- might be.

Florida wouldn't be the first team to experience it. Many skaters lucky enough to go deep into the playoffs multiple times have said the grind eventually takes its toll. Will that be the Panthers' reality after two long runs?

Montreal Canadiens

How will the defense be built?

The Canadiens are still in the middle of a long-term rebuild. However, there's potential for the team to take significant steps forward -- once they settle on a strong blue line.

Fortunately, the Canadiens have options. The recently extended Kaiden Guhle is a lock for a top-pairing role, while David Savard and Mike Matheson should provide solid veteran presence. It's a full-blown competition for spots from there. Justin Barron, Jordan Harris, Jayden Struble and Arber Xhekaj will all make their case for ice time, and prospect Lane Hutson will show in camp whether he's ready for an NHL gig.

Montreal was tied for No. 27 overall in goals against last season (3.43 per game) and No. 30 in shots against, so finding the right formula on the back end is vital to improving.

Ottawa Senators

Can Travis Green get the Senators to the next level?

Ottawa has -- to put it mildly -- gone through some changes. There has been a new owner, new management and a new coach implemented all in the past 12 months, and a number of fresh faces looking to take roster spots on the ice. That's all been done in the name of helping Ottawa become an actual contender in the Atlantic again.

New bench boss Travis Green is at the center of that mission. Speaking of centers, Green has superb depth there -- from Josh Norris to Tim Stutzle to Shane Pinto -- ready to go, and a healthy Thomas Chabot on the back end.

From there, it's on Green to sift through a landslide of depth options -- Noah Gregor, Nick Cousins, even Nikolay Kulemin -- on offense, and the likes of Jacob Bernard-Docker and Maxence Guenette on defense. Green said his players can expect a tough training camp.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Who fills the Steven Stamkos-sized hole?

The Lightning have entered a new era, and it doesn't include former captain Steven Stamkos. Tampa Bay let the longtime face of the franchise walk in free agency, essentially replacing him with Jake Guentzel.

There's no telling how Stamkos' absence will affect Tampa Bay on the ice and in the locker room, where he'd been a stable presence for more than a decade (and through two Stanley Cup victories). The Lightning have been aggressive in their dealings before, and moving away from Stamkos, trading Mikhail Sergachev to Utah, reeling in Guentzel and even bringing back former defenseman Ryan McDonagh showed GM Julien BriseBoise isn't afraid of making waves.

Training camp will be the first take on a new-look Lightning group and could signal whether Tampa Bay is back on a potential championship track, or proof that too much change isn't a good thing.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Will center depth be a problem?

The Leafs prioritized adding to several areas in the offseason, but center wasn't one of them. Is that going to be a problem for new coach Craig Berube?

Toronto's current lineup has Auston Matthews and John Tavares locked into their top-six pivot spots. After that, it's anyone's guess how Berube is going to fill in those gaps.

Naturally, the idea of William Nylander sliding back to center has surfaced. It's an experiment the Leafs have gone back to -- with varied results -- at least once a season for years. Max Domi had success at center last season as an injury replacement but he wouldn't be a long-term solution for a job. And David Kampf is stronger in a fourth-line position.

So what will Toronto do? Turn to Pontus Holmberg or Fraser Minten? The team has to think Berube's fresh eyes on the roster will help in finding a quick solution.

Metropolitan Division

Carolina Hurricanes

After offseason losses, is there enough defensive depth?

The Hurricanes enter training camp without Brady Skjei and Brett Pesce, two previous stalwarts on their blue line who played heavy minutes. Those are mighty big skates to fill.

Carolina made some free agent acquisitions for the back end, bringing back Shayne Gostisbehere and inking veteran Sean Walker. Jaccob Slavin will be an expected star on the defense, too, and Dmitry Orlov will play big minutes. But what about the aging Brent Burns? Can he still play an effective role to keep Slavin from burning out? Will Jalen Chatfield carry a larger load?

Carolina has prospects waiting in the wings, but rushing them with too much responsibility could backfire. The Hurricanes' history as a heavy, defensive group could be shifting this season -- and might unveil a whole new identity for a team that's perennially knocking on the door of a Cup Final bid.

Columbus Blue Jackets

How will the offense be redefined?

The Blue Jackets will have an open competition for roster spots when training camp opens, but the offensive possibilities are intriguing. The Blue Jackets signed veteran Sean Monahan, while Patrik Laine and Alexandre Texier have exited. Monahan had 26 goals and 59 points last season, proving he can still have an impact in the right role. That's good news for Columbus. Adding veteran James van Riemsdyk on a one-year deal gives Columbus depth.

The Blue Jackets are obviously grieving the loss of Johnny Gaudreau, whose tragic death leaves an irreplaceable void in their organization. Columbus has to figure out who can help it light the lamp and improve on an offense that ranked

25th in the NHL in 2023-24, averaging fewer than three goals per game.

Can Kent Johnson come back strong from a poor 2023-24 campaign and offseason surgery? That would help. The Blue Jackets dealt with consecutive years of poor injury luck that limited the availability of top skaters, including Boone Jenner and Adam Fantilli. Both of them will need to thrive in significant roles for Columbus to make progress this season.

New Jersey Devils

How will Sheldon Keefe get the team back on track?

The Devils missed out on a playoff berth last season. It's partially why GM Tom Fitzgerald needed to find a new coach, tapping Sheldon Keefe for the job. Keefe's resume includes four consecutive trips to the playoffs in his first NHL head-coaching stint with the Maple Leafs. He has experience managing young talent, something with which New Jersey is stocked.

On paper, it appears Keefe and the Devils are an ideal fit. Training camp will start to reveal whether that's truly the case.

This is Keefe's first professional opportunity outside Toronto -- he was the organization's AHL coach for five years before taking over behind the Leafs' bench -- and there will be a learning curve in New Jersey. Keefe might even have more rising stars to juggle now than ever. Will the Devils embrace Keefe's style and thrive? That answer will define New Jersey's success.

New York Islanders

Can they score enough goals?

The Islanders' most pressing problem now or at any point in the season would be an injury to goalie Ilya Sorokin. New York's coach Patrick Roy revealed Sorokin had offseason back surgery that was not "the perfect thing" but Roy said he "thinks [Sorokin] will be fine....when he's ready, he'll help us." GM Lou Lamoriello said previously that the injury is not something the team is "concerned" about, and Sorokin should be available at some point during camp.

Let's assume that's the case and move onto familiar territory for the Islanders: scoring ... or a lack of it.

New York's 22nd-ranked offense last season barely got it into the playoffs (Sorokin was a primary catalyst in that feat). Lamoriello signed Anthony Duclair and Maxim Tsyplakov (a 30-goal scorer in the KHL last season) after New York's first-round postseason exit. But it raises the same questions; do the Islanders expect that's enough to enliven their offense? We'll see.

New York Rangers

Is Jacob Trouba poised to bounce back?

The Rangers have an established roster at this stage. Other than settling on their top-line right winger -- a position that was constantly in flux last season -- there's a pretty clear picture for the rest of the lineup.

What's less obvious is how captain Jacob Trouba will bounce back from last season's slide into a third-pairing slot, a lackluster playoff performance, and a long offseason of trade rumors. Trouba suffered an injury late last season that impacted his play down the stretch, so health is a primary factor in any sort of comeback attempt.

And that's what New York needs from him. It doesn't mean Trouba has to carry 24 minutes per game. He just has to make positive impact plays at even strength and on special teams, to be the difference-making defenseman the Rangers obviously still believe he can be.

Philadelphia Flyers

What is the Flyers' identity?

There's a lot going on in Philadelphia. The Flyers have an exciting talent in Matvei Michkov who's already impressed his new coaches during rookie camp. Where might Michkov fit into Philadelphia's offense out of the gate, and how big a role will coach John Tortorella allow for him?

On that note, the Flyers are figuring out their center situation as well, with moving parts to slot into potentially new roles -- does Morgan Frost finally get a larger opportunity?

Defensively, the Flyers have an unknown in Rasmus Ristolainen given his health following triceps surgery. It all feels a little unsettled. Which is why, of course, training camp will be critical for Philadelphia to start building a foundation.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Who will be the starting goaltender?

Pittsburgh enters training camp without a clear-cut starter. Tristan Jarry held the No. 1 job for much of last season, but was replaced by backup Alex Nedeljkovic for the final 13 games. Nedeljkovic was an impressive 8-1-3 over that stretch, and his strong finish helped earn a two-year extension with the Penguins. He'll battle Jarry for a top spot on the depth chart during camp.

At the same time, Pittsburgh must also consider Joel Blomqvist's development following a standout season in the AHL, with top-five finishes in several major statistical categories. Managing each of their goalies will be critical for Pittsburgh's success in the short and long term. Camp will be the place for each goaltender to showcase his best work.

Washington Capitals

How will the newcomers fit in?

The Capitals are banking that a third trade is the charm for center Pierre Luc-Dubois, as he is a potential top-line center following his acquisition from Los Angeles this summer. The Capitals are hoping that Dubois can return to that level and perform like he did in 2022-23 for the Jets (posting a career-high 63 points in 73 games).

Beyond Dubois, Washington added Andrew Mangiapane, Brandon Duhaime and Taylor Raddysh to work into the rotation up front, and Jakob Chychrun and Matt Roy to bolster the defense. Logan Thompson also arrived via offseason trade to give Washington a one-two punch with Charlie Lindgren in net.

It's a significant number of new faces, and the Capitals are also dealing with uncertainty surrounding T.J. Oshie's future -- will he be back this season? -- and too much depth is a problem every team would like to have. The only question is how the Capitals will go about using theirs.

Central Division

Chicago Blackhawks

How will this season impact their long-term plans?

There's no question the Blackhawks are staging a promising rebuild, and their offseason moves raise questions about the speed at which they'll be truly competitive again. Adding several veterans -- such as Tyler Bertuzzi, Laurent Brossoit and Teuvo Teravainen, among others -- could help with addressing the deficiencies that made them one of the NHL's worst teams last season. So could the return of a fully healthy Taylor Hall, who sustained a knee injury last November.

Plus, this will be a pivotal season in the development of young cornerstones such as Connor Bedard, Kevin Korchinski, Philipp Kurashev and Alex Vlasic.

Finding cohesion among all those moving parts could see them finish with more than 70 points for the first time since the 2019-20 season. And if not, it could result in some of those veterans being moved at the trade deadline.

Colorado Avalanche

Is the supporting cast strong enough?

Performing well in the regular season isn't the issue for the Avalanche; they finished with more than 107 points the past two seasons. The playoffs, however, are another discussion altogether.

Since winning the Stanley Cup in 2022, they've hit a wall in two straight postseasons. One of the reasons for their struggles stems from a lack of consistent secondary and tertiary scoring. Having that supplementary support allowed them to beat the Jets in five games, only to lose to the Stars in six, scoring only six goals in the final four games of the series (three coming in one game).

Being in a championship window means that a front office must find solutions without significant cap space. The Avs added around the edges in the offseason, but it's also what makes the situations with Gabriel Landeskog, Nikolai Kovalenko, Logan O'Connor and Valeri Nichushkin so crucial. Their collective contributions could play a sizable role in the Avs' bid for the fourth Stanley Cup in franchise history -- or they could be looking for help at the deadline.

Dallas Stars

Is this the Stars' best Cup chance with this core?

Every championship challenger is forced to navigate the salary cap and must get creative. One of the ways the Stars have been creative with their cap challenges is having at least one player on an entry-level contract perform in a significant role. Alleviating their cap challenges with those sorts of players does come with a long-term problem: Eventually, they need to sign those players to bigger deals.

That process has already started for Dallas with defenseman Thomas Harley, who is an unsigned RFA after his rookie contract expired. It will continue with Mavrik Bourque and Wyatt Johnston, who are entering the final year of their ELCs. Goalie Jake Oettinger is also a pending RFA, and his next deal could be sizable.

Meanwhile, captain Jamie Benn and Matt Duchene are among the team's six-player UFA class next summer. There is certainly pressure on this group to excel given those realities.

Minnesota Wild

Do they have enough?

Enough scoring? Enough players who can stay healthy? Enough depth to take on another injury crisis?

Granted, that's more than just one question, but these are some of the more imperative ones in assessing whether the Wild have enough to make the playoffs.

Last season the Wild finished 21st in goals per game, and rookies Brock Faber and Marco Rossi were the only players on their roster to play in all 82 games. With their cap limitations, their major signing this summer was Yakov Trenin, who has hit double figures in goals in each of the past three seasons.

But can Trenin, along with incoming rookie Marat Khusnutdinov, provide another layer of scoring and stability needed for a team that saw 59% of its goals come from five players last season? And would that be enough to reach the playoffs?

Nashville Predators

After massive additions, what's a realistic expectation?

Even with their first-round exit, the Predators had a clear identity. They were a two-way team that just needed more goals and players who had significant playoff experience. So what are they now? That's where it gets interesting.

At minimum, the Predators remain a playoff-caliber team, and should be aiming for a top-three spot in the Central instead of the wild card. Beyond that is where the intrigue lies.

Adding Jonathan Marchessault, Brady Skjei and Steven Stamkos signals that the Predators are in win-now mode. What separates the Predators from a crowded field in the Western Conference appears to be cohesion. Both the Avalanche and Golden Knights had years to find the right combination needed to win a title. The same applies to the Oilers and the Stars, as they seek to find the configurations that could see them win it all.

So are the Preds in that class of teams that's capable of winning a Stanley Cup in 2024-25? Or are they in that next tier below, where there might be one or two details they need to address before cementing their status as a legit championship challenger?

St. Louis Blues

Have the defensive issues finally been solved?

This is a question that has plagued the Blues for the past two seasons, with the acknowledgment that there is rarely a quick solution. Shuffling their defensive corps wasn't a real option considering they have four defensemen each making more than $4 million annually who all have no-trade clauses.

Instead, the tactical adjustments started in the 2023 offseason, when they hired assistant coach Mike Weber to oversee their defensive overhaul. Even when Drew Bannister

took over during the 2023-24 season, the Blues allowed the fourth-most high-danger chances per 60 minutes, the fifth-most shots per 60, and the sixth-most scoring chances per 60. The reason they remained in the wild-card hunt was that their goalies finished with the fifth-best team save percentage under Bannister's watch.

This summer, GM Doug Armstrong added two-way forwards such as Radek Faksa, Mathieu Joseph and Alexandre Texier, while also acquiring defensemen such as Philip Broberg, Pierre-Olivier Joseph and Ryan Suter, with Torey Krug lost for the year because of ankle surgery. Will the results be different?

Utah Hockey Club

Can they make the playoffs in their first season

New franchises can get into the playoffs early in their existence. The Golden Knights made the Cup Final in their first season, while the Kraken made it to the second round in their sophomore campaign. Could Utah could make the playoffs in its first season?

Utah coach Andre Tourigny has a strong familiarity with several players on the roster given he coached more than a dozen of them when he was in charge of the Arizona Coyotes last season. Tourigny had the Coyotes challenging for a playoff spot through late January, until a 14-game losing streak derailed those aspirations. Coupled with offseason defensive additions such as Ian Cole, John Marino and Mikhail Sergachev, there's belief Utah could challenge for a wild-card spot.

If that's not enough, Utah GM Bill Armstrong has more than $9 million in cap space to strengthen the roster with impact additions.

Winnipeg Jets

How will Scott Arniel put his stamp on the team?

There are teams that are judged by what they do in the playoffs. There are teams that are judged on whether or not they reach the playoffs. It appears the Jets might be somewhere in the middle when it comes to what they can accomplish now that Arniel has gone from an assistant under Rick Bowness to head coach.

Part of the challenge facing Arniel is how to get the Jets beyond the first round. The past two postseasons have shown a similar pattern: The Jets scored at least five goals to win the opening game, only to then lose the next four en route to an early exit.

But before that, there's a question of whether the Jets will claim one of the three divisional playoff spots or be among the teams going for a wild card. The Avs and Stars look like top Cup contenders, while an aggressive offseason could see the Predators force the issue. Arniel can't simply put the team in cruise control and expect to make the postseason again.

Pacific Division

Anaheim Ducks

Can they eclipse 30 wins in Greg Cronin's second season?

Every rebuild has its nuances, but all seek some signs of progress. For the Ducks, one of those benchmarks is winning 30 games or more. They were one of four teams last season that won fewer than 30, and have surpassed the 30-win mark just once in the past five years.

A big thing that prevented the Ducks from hitting the mark in Cronin's first season were the lengthy losing streaks -- the Ducks had five stretches in which they lost more than five in a row. Then there's how they lost those games. The Ducks had 23 games in which they allowed more than three goals, and nearly half of those games saw them lose by more than three. Getting the details down better in Year 2 for Cronin should lead to better results and some steps in the right direction.

Calgary Flames

What is the Flames' identity?

A year ago, the Flames were in a state of flux. They didn't know what players were staying or going, despite having several players who were under contract for more than two years.

After maneuvering the roster challenges, the Flames appeared to find an identity: They were seven points out of the wild-card spot by early March, only to lose eight of their next 10 games, which effectively took them out of the playoff conversation. But they were able to get a stronger feel for in-season acquisitions Andrei Kuzmenko and Daniil Miromanov, and see how homegrown talents such as Matt Coronato and Dustin Wolf performed.

Those players -- along with the Flames' offseason additions -- will play a key part in assessing their short- and long-term identity, and whether a playoff berth is in the cards.

Edmonton Oilers

Is this the best Oilers team in the Connor McDavid-Leon Draisaitl era?

Everything the front office did this offseason was focused on winning that 16th playoff game and capturing an elusive sixth championship. That includes signing UFA forwards Viktor Arvidsson and Jeff Skinner, while returning a number of veterans and inking Draisaitl to a $112 million contract that kicks in for 2025-26.

All of it came with a cost: The Oilers couldn't afford to keep homegrown talents such as Vincent Desharnais, who left in free agency, while Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway signed offer sheets with the Blues that the Oilers didn't match. While those decisions led to questions in the short term, the concerns won't matter as much if this season ends with the Oilers winning the Cup.

Los Angeles Kings

Is Darcy Kuemper the solution to the goaltending woes?

As the Kings continue to struggle to get out of the first round, one of the issues is their goaltending. They've gone through Cal Petersen, Jonathan Quick, Pheonix Copley, Joonas Korpisalo, David Rittich and Cam Talbot, with the belief that one of them could be the answer only to end up still asking the same question.

That's what made getting a Cup winner in Kuemper in exchange for Pierre-Luc Dubois rather intriguing. Kuemper was arguably the biggest reason the Coyotes made it out of

the opening round in the 2020 bubble playoffs. He also played a key role in the Avs' Cup victory back in 2022. The Kings are banking on the fact that Kuemper could help them get into (and beyond) the second round, knowing another early exit would mark their fourth straight.

San Jose Sharks

How much better will the Sharks be?

Here's how bad last season was for the Sharks:

They had the NHL's worst record.

They were the only team that didn't win 20 games.

They had a minus-150 goal differential. They had the fewest home wins in the NHL.

While those factors made it one of the worst seasons in franchise history, it has paved the way for their current situation.

It starts with hiring a new head coach in Ryan Warsofsky. They won the draft lottery and used the No. 1 pick to draft Macklin Celebrini, pairing him with 2023 No. 4 pick Will Smith to serve as the faces of their franchise. They also added veterans such as Cody Ceci, Barclay Goodrow, Tyler Toffoli and Jake Walman, and traded for a long-term franchise goalie in Yaroslav Askarov.

With these moves, there's belief that the rebuilding Sharks will be much better than the basement-dwelling version of a season ago.

Seattle Kraken

Can a new coaching staff solve old problems?

The Kraken were a win away from the Western Conference finals in their second season. But last season, they had the fourth-lowest shooting percentage in the league coupled with general inconsistency, which is why they missed the playoffs and subsequently made an offseason coaching change.

They hired former Penguins and Sabres coach Dan Bylsma to take over after he and his staff took the Kraken's AHL affiliate to consecutive Calder Cup finals on the strength of one of the league's most prolific offenses.

Promoting Bylsma along with assistant coach Jessica Campbell, the first woman to be behind a bench in NHL history, was done with the belief that their AHL success can help the Kraken rediscover their scoring touch and challenge for a playoff spot.

Vancouver Canucks

In which direction are the Canucks heading?

Progress has been at the forefront ever since the Canucks hired coach Rick Tocchet. He won 20 of the first 36 games after replacing Bruce Boudreau in 2022. He led them to a 109-point season, winning the Pacific Division and coming within a victory of advancing to the Western Conference finals. And they did it all while missing star goalie Thatcher Demko for a substantial portion of the season.

So what's next? Building on that momentum -- or regression?

While the Canucks lost Elias Lindholm and Nikita Zadorov in free agency, they have the rest of their core intact. They used the offseason to add more scoring, while supplementing their defensive group as well. It all sets the Canucks up to be one of the teams to watch in the West; this season could be defined by more progress -- or a lack thereof.

Vegas Golden Knights

How will the new-look Golden Knights fare?

Change is nothing new for the Golden Knights. If anything, managing everything that comes with change has been the constant for a franchise that has been defined by its win-at-all-costs mentality.

The Golden Knights lost seven players in the offseason, and six of them were on the Stanley Cup-winning roster. They now have 13 players remaining from that championship team. Much of the core is intact, but Conn Smythe winner -- and original Golden Misfit Jonathan Marchessault -- was among those who are now playing elsewhere.

All of that talent and experience heading out the door raises questions: How will Victor Olofsson fit within their forward rotation? What sort of impact will Alexander Holtz have? Which version of Ilya Samsonov will they have in a goaltending tandem with Adin Hill?

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 18, 2024

The Hockey News

Hurricanes Release 2024 Training Camp Rosters

By Ryan Henkel

The Canes will split 46 players between two groups.

On the eve of training camp, the Carolina Hurricanes have finally released the full camp roster.

The Canes will have 46 players at camp split between two groups: C1 and C2.

The C1 group consists of all of the expected NHL starters plus a few of the depth pieces.

The roster breakdown is as follows:

Forwards

Andrei Svechnikov - Sebastian Aho - Seth Jarvis

Jack Roslovic - Jesperi Kotkaniemi - Martin Necas

William Carrier - Jordan Staal - Jordan Martinook

Tyson Jost - Jack Drury - Brendan Lemieux

Eric Robinson

Defense

Jaccob Slavin - Brent Burns

Dmitry Orlov - Jalen Chatfield

Shayne Gostisbehere - Sean Walker

Ty Smith - Joakim Ryan

Goalies

Frederik Andersen

Pyotr Kochetkov

The C2 group consists of all of the invited prospects, a few of the assumed AHL depth players and a few PTOs.

The PTOs include Sam Gagner, Rocco Grimaldi and Skyler Brind'Amour.

The roster breakdown is as follows:

Forwards

Bradly Nadeau - Ryan Suzuki - Felix Unger Sorum

Gleb Trikozov - Skyler Brind'Amour - Jackson Blake

Josiah Slavin - Sam Gagner - Noel Gunler

Juha Jaska - Justin Robidas - Rocco Grimaldi

Defense

Ronan Seeley - Scott Morrow

Anttoni Honka - Aleksi Heimosalmi

Riley Stillman - Charles-Alexis Legault

Domenick Fensore - Bryce Montgomer

Goalies

Spencer Martin

Yaniv Perets

Ruslan Khazheyev

The Hurricanes will hold medical and physical testing tomorrow and the first on-ice activities will begin Thursday.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 18, 2024

Return of the Jokers: How Current and Former NHLers Helped Save One of Finland's Most Iconic Brands

By Ryan Henkel

Helsinki Jokerit is one of the most iconic brands in Finland.

Even beyond the hockey-crazed nation though, the winking jester logo is still recognizable all across the hockey world.

But the Jokers, even with all their fame, were almost lost to history.

Since its founding in 1967, Jokerit enjoyed a long streak of success within SM-Liiga, Finland's highest level of hockey.

Over its history, Jokerit won six league championships and developed some of the world's greatest Finnish ice hockey talent such as Jari Kurri and Teemu Selanne – the only two Finnish NHLers in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

However, Jokerit's history hasn't always been based in Finland.

In 2013, the Jokers shocked the Finnish hockey scene by leaving Liiga to join the KHL.

Jokerit's owner at the time, Finnish businessman and politician Harry Harkimo, saw the expansion to the KHL as a large financial opportunity and sold a 49% stake in the team as well as the rights to Hartwell Arena (now Helsinki Halli), Jokerit's home rink, to Russian oligarchs Gennady Timchenko and Arkady, Boris and Roman Rotenberg

The Jokers would play seven seasons in the KHL until 2022, when following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Jokerit Helsinki's then owner, former player Jari Kurri, made the decision to leave the league.

Initially, it was just a withdrawal from the playoffs which were slated to start just three days after the invasion began, but a few months later and following widespread pushback from fans, shareholders and sponsors, the team announced that they were leaving the KHL for good.

Jokerit looked to rejoin Liiga that following season, but the Finnish Ice Hockey Association denied their request and subsequently imposed a two-year suspension on entry into Liiga.

Jokerit was now a team without a league.

Kurri, who had reacquired 100% stake in the team following the withdrawal, wanted to sell and after a few opportunities fell through, things started to look bleak for the iconic team.

With no league, no home, no team, Jokerit was on the verge of becoming just a memory.

However, a new opportunity rose from the ashes.

Mikko Saarni, Finnish businessman and former hockey player, was recruited to join another ownership attempt as a consultant, but before he knew it, he was leading a new ownership group

"I was asked to be a consultant for Jokerit a year before," Saarni said in a phone call with The Hockey News back in September of 2023. "I started to do that and then one thing led to another and at the end of the process, in January (2023), I became the chairman and the majority owner of Jokerit."

No stranger to hockey, the Tampere native was a member of the U16 Finnish national junior team in 1993 and after injuries forced him off the ice, he turned his savvy to player development and the business world.

Saarni had been involved in various hockey academies and one of his first companies, Universal Players Global, provides Finnish and European students with the opportunity to combine education, athletics and hobbies with international experience.

Once he was named Chairman, Saarni knew he had to work fast, but he already had a plan for who to contact first.

That first phone call

Long-time Jokerit captain and former NHLer, Ossi Väänänen.

"I talked to him around December, and I didn't know Mikko before, but after that phone call, I believed everything he was saying," Väänänen recalled on a phone call with The Hockey News back in September of 2023. "His vision, how Jokerit should look like, what direction we want to take the club to, everything kind of matched and it was easy to buy what he was saying. After that phone call, it was a very strong feeling in me that I wanted to be involved. It's my home team where I grew up. I always played pro here with Jokerit when I was in Finland, so I have a close relationship with the club.

"When it came time for an opportunity for me to be on board with this and to be an owner, I felt like it was kind of a once in a lifetime opportunity. These opportunities don't come across often where I had a chance to hop in with my old club as an owner and try to lift the club back to the glory days."

And that vision for Jokerit?

“The plan that I have in mind for Jokerit is really focused on our own player production,” Saarni said. “We want to put the focus on bringing our own guys to the top level and we're going to emphasize that a lot and actually put a lot of resources and money into their coaching and all the things related to all the individuals that we have in the youth organization.”

According to Saarni, Jokerit’s goal is to be a true homegrown talent pipeline that produces at least 50% of their own talent from the clubs junior teams.

The Finnish junior system is a fair bit different than that in North America as players tend to stay with one club throughout their development.

Currently, the Jokerit organization encompasses around 700 players from U20 all the way down to the 'Learn to Skate' programs, so it's one of the largest talent pools in Finland.

But even with that large pool, a 50% promise is still a lofty goal, but it’s that sort of big dream that brought some key names to the table.

With Väänänen on board, the former captain happily took the baton as he already had an idea on how to help build up the new ownership group.

Väänänen had two players in mind who perfectly personified Jokerit’s new vision of developing homegrown talent to the highest level: Teuvo Teräväinen and Esa Lindell.

“I played with both of those guys, with Teuvo and with Esa, in Jokerit when they came up to the main club as young kids and so I knew the guys beforehand and I knew what kind of persons they are,” Väänänen said. “They’re good guys. Really good guys and I also know that they really care about the club and that it's important for them. Esa and Teuvo, both of them really, our message spoke to them when it comes to juniors because they've been through it so they know it's really important. Right off the first phone call with the guys, they were very interested and they wanted to be on board. So after that, it was just to go through all the details, what it means, and all that kind of stuff. But mentally, they were on board right away.”

Teräväinen and Lindell, both Helsinki natives, not only grew up watching and idolizing Jokerit, but worked their way up through the Jokers’ junior system together as well.

“Ossi called both me and Teuvo a couple of times,” Lindell recalled in a phone interview with The Hockey News in back in October. “I spoke with Teuvo a couple of times during the spring last year and then when things started to move on, we spoke with Mikko as well and there were some meetings with all of us. It took about a month maybe, but me and Teuvo were interested right away to get in though. Just the chance to help our team. I’ve always cheered for them back home too, so it was a cool thing to get asked into that."

“Just the opportunity to get the team back on their feet and winning and then to give the young players the chance to have the same junior path that me, Teuvo and Ossi had when we grew up. I would say those three things were the biggest impactors for why I wanted to get into it.”

“There had been a lot of negativity in the Finnish news about Jokerit and the KHL and everything,” Teräväinen told The Hockey News. “Then the KHL stuff happened and they went back, but they didn’t have a team for a couple of years. They needed to do something. When I heard for the first time that I could be part of it, it was a good feeling. I wanted to help. It’s my team. It’s the one I grew up and played with. They helped me a lot to become the player I am right now. So I wanted to help the team to get back on track. Right away I felt good about it.”

And according to Saarni, the impact of their investment goes beyond the financials.

“Obviously, they both invested into it, but it's not about the money,” Saarni said. “It wasn't financial. It was more the fact that they are great examples of a product that has gone through the Jokerit youth program all the way up to the top and then to the NHL and have been impact players in the NHL as well. I think they're great role models for our youth players in that sense.

“Also, it's important for us to get the updated information from the top level to kind of know what it takes. The game is getting better and better all the time, faster and faster, and the requirements for a hockey player now are different than 10 years ago, or 20 years ago. So getting that feedback from those guys, from the best league in the world is great for us. So I think those two things were the biggest reasons why we wanted them to be a part of this.”

It’s been a bit strange for the current NHLers to not only be playing for a team, but owning one as well, however both are still primarily focused on their current playing careers.

“I always dreamed of being a hockey player,” Teräväinen said. “I never dreamed of anything like this, but it’s my team that I grew up playing with, so I wanted to be a part of it and help the team get back to where it was. It’s been pretty fun. I haven’t been too involved yet because I have my own hockey career, but it’s something that’s nice to be a part of. Right now I’m focused more on my career, so I don’t have to do too much right now, but it could be something I will do after my career.”

“It’s pretty great,” Lindell said. “Fun. It’s been only positive so far. I have to admit, one thing I was thinking about before getting in is that I’m not a big media fan or person and I’m not out there doing any social stuff, but it’s been only positive. It will be interesting to see once our games are done, what’s next ahead of us, but I would think hockey is involved and Jokerit would be a good thing.”

Despite cutting all ties to the KHL, Jokerit still has a strenuous path ahead of them before the Finnish Ice Hockey Association will allow them back into the fold.

“It's been very interesting to begin with,” Väänänen said. “I kind of knew to expect it, but the biggest surprise for me has maybe been dealing with the hockey scene overall here in Finland when it comes to permissions to play. The situation that we were in, is something that we've never seen before where a team joins the KHL and not many people liked it to begin with and then the war starts and that move looks really bad and Jokerit got a lot of crap for it. The Finnish Ice Hockey Federation was very tough on us, understandably, but we have to be very transparent and show everything, that we have no connections to previous owners or people that were involved with the KHL Jokerit.

“We did everything by the book, as we should, and like we wanted to do it, but the tightness of it was kind of a surprise. But we're here, we're playing right now, so we’re good at the moment. But at points, it was really difficult for us to get all the things that they wanted to in order with the schedule we had.”

“We had to go through a very strict process with the association,” Saarni said. “Being very open about our plans and always keeping them involved and all that because of the history of Jokerit which was fine for us. We then applied for the Mestis license and followed all the requirements that were given to us. It was a lot of work, but at the end of the day we got it done and we're extremely happy about it”

Despite the hiatus, the passion of Jokerit’s fanbase has not diminished, even with the Jokers having to start their return home in Mestis – Finland’s second league – due to stipulations by the FIHA that forbade them from playing in Liiga until at least 2025

That fan support was one of the things the team was worried about because the fires back home didn’t just start from the Ukrainian War, but from the initial flight to the KHL and the sale of the team to Russians and Russian-backed interests.

But in their opening game, a crowd of 8,200 strong set a Mestis record for attendance and the craze hasn’t shown any signs of slowing down.

“We all knew that the fans were there, but it's been better than anybody expected,” Saarni said. “And of course, when you have a fan base like Jokerit has, you want to deliver for the fans as well and I think we have a winning team put together that can win games. So far we've been successful with that. We’re young, but so far, so good and I also believe that as the team goes along, we're getting better and better because our players are young and talented and we're training them as a full, professional hockey team. So the results will be there and we can make the fans happy.”

“We've been kind of overwhelmed with the support we've gotten,” Väänänen said. “We got a lot of fans in our games, more fans than a lot of the main league teams even though we are in the lower tier at the moment. So the fanbase is really solid.”

And that passion is clear even on the other side of the world.

“It’s been great,” Lindell said about the fanbase’s reception. “The reason I wanted to get on board with the whole situation was seeing all the fans, players and everyone around the team with all the positive hype. The hype is big around the team and I feel it’s just growing. All the hype in the second division league back home is big. One of the places Jokerit played, they made records in attendance and stuff so it’s been cool to follow.”

“It’s been good,” Teräväinen repeated. “Everyone is excited, but the fans especially are really excited that Jokerit is back. It looks good but we still have a lot of things to work on, so it will be a good ride.”

Even beyond the fan support, Jokerit is just getting richer in terms of NHL support too as long-timer veteran Valtteri Filppula joined this season not only as captain of the team, but also as a part of the new ownership group too.

Filppula is also forgoing his player salary, doing this all just for the love of his old club.

“It was important for us to be able to offer Valtteri a comprehensive package that will continue even after his playing career," Saarni said in a team press release. "We are committing to each other for many years to come. We will take it year-by-year, and at least for the first season, Valtteri’s role is as a player. His commitment to the Jokers is also indicated by the fact that his inclusion will not burden our player budget at all in the coming season.”

While the path forward for the Jokers is so much clearer now, the journey is still far from over.

The team still has at least one more season to play in Mestis and before they can rejoin Liiga, they have to get approval from the FIHA.

“Our plan is to play in Mestis this season,” Saarni said. “We are expecting that we can apply to Liga for 2025-26, but of course, now, during this time, we need to fulfill all the requirements that Liiga has, but I'm confident that we will be able to meet those requirements whatever they may give us and we will apply as soon as possible.”

But from where they were only a few years earlier to now, shows just how committed the new ownership group is to reviving the Jokerit brand fully back to its former glory.

And with how much support they've gotten, it's only a matter of time before the Jokers make it back to the top.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 18, 2024

Carolina Hurricanes sign Sam Gagner, Rocco Grimaldi, and Skyler Brind'Amour to PTOs

By Steven McGoey

Grimaldi was second in AHL scoring last season, Gagner spent time with Bakersfield and Brind'Amour played his first professional season with Charlotte

Sam Gagner, Rocco Grimaldi, and Skyler Brind'Amour will attend Carolina Hurricanes training camp on Professional Tryout contracts, per The Hockey News' Ryan Henkel and the Carolina training camp roster.

Gagner split last season between the Edmonton Oilers and Bakersfield Condors, notching 10 points in 28 NHL games and nine in 15 AHL games. In brief AHL stints Gagner has 566 goals in 71 games.

The 35-year-old has played 1043 career NHL games and would be a valuable leadership addition that could play NHL games for Carolina or mentor the Hurricanes prospects with AHL Chicago.

Grimaldi has been one of the best players in the AHL over the last three seasons. He finished second in the league in points and third in goals last season with 36 goals and 73 points in 72 games. He played in the All-Star Game and made the AHL Second All-Star Team.

The 31-year-old has 370 points in 433 career AHL games and has been above a point-per-game the last three seasons. He led Team USA in points with 14 in 10 games at the 2023 IIHF World Championship. He has 67 points in 203 career NHL games.

A second round pick of Florida in 2011, Grimaldi is spent last year with the Chicago Wolves when they were independently owned. He could play an energetic bottom-six role for the Hurricanes and could shoulder the offensive load if he returns to the AHL.

Skyler Brind'Amour, son of Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour, signed a two-year AHL deal with the Charlotte Checkers after winning the 2023 NCAA Championship with Quinnipiac University.

He spent last season with Florida's AHL affiliate and recorded eight points in 54 games. Tony Androckitis of Inside AHL Hockey reports that Brind'Amour and Charlotte have mutually parted ways and that he will be joining the Carolina organization.

The 25-year-old was originally selected in the sixth round of the 2017 draft by the Edmonton Oilers.

Make sure you bookmark The Hockey News' AHL Page for the latest news, exclusive interviews, breakdowns and so much more.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 18, 2024

CBS17.COM NEWS LOCAL NEWS THAT MATTERS

Carolina Hurricanes, NC State leaders to unveil new sign for Lenovo Center on Thursday

By Keaton Eberly

Note: The accompanying video shows previous coverage of the Lenovo naming rights deal announcement from Sept. 12.

RALEIGH, N.C. (WNCN) – Leadership for the Carolina Hurricanes and North Carolina State University will unveil signage for the newly-named Lenovo Center on Thursday.

The Centennial Authority, the governing body for the arena, plans to welcome state officials as well as Lenovo executives and employees for a celebration ceremony that will reveal a sign that showcases the venue's new name.

Among those slated to attend are North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, Centennial Authority Chairman Philip Isley and Ryan McCurdy, the senior vice-president and president of Lenovo North America.

Other notable figures expected to be at the ceremony include Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, head coach Rod Brind'Amour and N.C. State athletics director Boo Corrigan.

This event comes exactly one week after the Centennial Authority officially approved the $60 million, 10-year naming rights deal, running through the 2033-34 season. The facility, which opened its doors in 1999, had been known as PNC Arena for nearly 12 years.

"Lenovo has been a valued partner of ours for many years," Brian Fork, chief executive officer of Hurricanes Holdings, LLC, said when the announcement was made last week. "We're thrilled to elevate that partnership now by renaming the arena Lenovo Center. Lenovo has both strong local ties and a worldwide footprint, and we're proud to have the Hurricanes' name associated with a true leader in global technology. As we transition to this new era, we are grateful for our longtime naming rights collaborator, PNC, who will continue to be a major partner of our organization."

The Centennial Authority unanimously agreed to the name, while N.C. State officials also voted in favor of the change.

"This is an exciting day for Raleigh, Wake County and the whole state of North Carolina," Isley said last week. "This partnership is about more than just renaming the arena. Lenovo will play a vital role integrating technology into our upcoming arena renovations and enhancements. Lenovo has deep roots in North Carolina, and we're thrilled that they are strengthening those roots with this naming rights agreement."

Newly unveiled renderings of the Raleigh Sports & Entertainment District, the new $1 billion mixed-use development surrounding the arena that serves as the home to the Carolina Hurricanes and NC State basketball. (Courtesy: Carolina Hurricanes)

Newly unveiled renderings of the Raleigh Sports & Entertainment District, the new $1 billion mixed-use development surrounding the arena that serves as the home to the Carolina Hurricanes and NC State basketball. (Courtesy: Carolina Hurricanes)

In addition to the rights deal, tons of major renovations are on the horizon surrounding the Lenovo Center, such as a $1 billion mixed-use development plan for the Raleigh Sports and Entertainment District, scheduled to start building in December 2025. The 80-acre site will "provide new opportunities for shopping, dining and entertainment" all year long for sports fans and concertgoers, along with expanded parking and tailgating space, according to a news release.

Concept renderings illustrate the ambitious designs for transforming the area around the Lenovo Center and Carter-Finley Stadium. Project leaders said the first phase of the development will include the following:

The construction of a 150-room hotel and more than 500 apartments

A 4,300-seat music venue operated by Live Nation

Over 200,000 square feet of entertainment and lifestyle retail, as well as 150,000 square feet of office space

Dallas-based Pacific Elm Properties and Gale Force Sports and Entertainment, the Hurricanes' parent company, are tasked with developing the entertainment district. The expected timeline for the project is estimated to be 15 years.

"This development is the next step toward building the premier sports and entertainment district in the country and keeping the area a regional economic driver for decades to come," Fork said in a previous statement about the development plans.

Project organizers also described the new space as "blending time-honored traditions with state-of-the-art innovation" for thousands of fans to gather.

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Articles from outlets covering the Hurricanes' upcoming opponents and league-wide news

1320503 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning to bring fans onto the ice with custom center-ice logo

The team's more than 6,000 season ticket holders, partners and suite holders have their names frozen into the ice at Amalie Arena.

Eduardo A. Encina

TAMPA — The Lightning literally will take their fans onto the ice with them this season.

The team said Tuesday that the names of its more than 6,000 season-ticket holders, partners and suite holders will be within the center-ice lightning bolt logo at Amalie Arena.

And as part of the club's Lightning Launch season-ticket holder event Friday, fans will have the opportunity to step onto the ice and see their names. Placing the names at center ice is a tribute to the Lightning's key supporters to signify that "they are at the center of everything the organization does," the team said in a news release.

When the ice was installed in mid-August, a custom version of the bolt with the names was frozen into the ice. The full logo then was painted over it. A re-creation will be unveiled for Friday's invitation-only event at 6:30 p.m. at Amalie Arena.

The project needed approval from the NHL's hockey operations and business operations departments. Jet Ice, a Canadian company that creates and paints on-ice logos, also was instrumental in the project.

The installation is part of the Lightning's rebranding of its season-ticket program, now calling ticket holders "Bolts for Life." The Lighting said that more than 90% of season-ticket holders renewed for this season, which starts Oct. 11 at the Hurricanes.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 09.18.2024

1320504 Tampa Bay Lightning

Top storylines heading into Lightning training camp

As the team takes the ice, we'll have to get used to some new faces, as well as the absence of an iconic player.

Eduardo A. Encina

TAMPA — After one of the most transitional offseasons in recent history, the Lightning open training camp this week starting with Wednesday's report day, followed by the first practice Thursday morning at 10:30 at TGH IcePlex in Brandon.

The Lightning certainly will have a different look: Captain Steven Stamkos is gone and Jake Guentzel is in, projected to fill the left wing spot on the top line alongside Hart Trophy runnerup Nikita Kucherov and center Brayden Point.

General manager Julien BriseBois' focus was to make the Lightning a better 5-on-5 team in 2024-25, particularly defensively. Tampa Bay had the league's top power play and a top-five penalty kill last season, and scored more than enough 5-on-5 goals to win, but the play in its own end was inconsistent.

BriseBois also tried to extend the Lightning's window to compete for Stanley Cups by getting younger and putting the team in a better situation under the salary cap. That included trading defenseman Mikhail Sergachev's contract to Utah in return for cap space and two under-25 players who should play big roles in the team's future.

You'll need a roster to familiarize yourself with some new faces and have to hope Stamkos' presence can be filled both on and off the ice. That said, here are the four big storylines going into training camp.

Life after Stamkos

The biggest plot line entering camp is an obvious one, and it centers around who isn't here anymore. Stamkos now suits up in a Predators uniform, and his departure leaves a major hole in the Lightning's DNA. Not only is Stamkos one of the most iconic players in franchise history, he was the unquestioned leader in the dressing room as one of the league's longest-tenured captains.

Replacing Stamkos' 40 goals and 81 points is one thing. The Lightning signed Guentzel, who is five years younger and averaged 35 goals and 78 points the past three seasons, to a seven-year deal in the hope he can fill the scoring void.

But the loss of Stamkos also takes away a significant part of the franchise's Stanley Cup-era swagger. Throughout the tough times the past two seasons, the Lightning could lean on Stamkos to keep the room focused by saying the right thing at the right time. That role now falls to Victor Hedman, who is the favorite to become the team's new captain, as well as returning defenseman Ryan McDonagh, both of whom had leadership roles on Cup-winning teams.

Make no mistake, there are only seven members of the Lightning's 2021 Cup team remaining on the roster, the byproduct of today's salary-cap NHL. But Stamkos' loss is the biggest yet, and the awkward split didn't

help. If the Lightning struggle early, expect No. 91′s absence to stand out even more.

How's the health?

Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy missed the first six weeks of last season with a back injury.

The Lightning were hit with some major injuries at the start of the past few seasons, so even though you'd expect them to be at full strength to open the season, they always seem to be missing someone important.

Last season, goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy exited the first training camp practice early after reaggravating a back injury he suffered while weight training during the offseason. A few days later, he had surgery to repair a disk in his lower back and missed the first six weeks of the season.

Vasilevskiy didn't have the benefit of a preseason, so it took time for him to find his footing. The Lightning treaded water during his absence and in mid-January were in danger of missing the postseason. They needed a strong finish just to secure a playoff spot.

Two seasons ago, the Lightning had to overcome a shoulder injury to second-line center Anthony Cirelli to open the season. Three years ago, they were without Nikita Kucherov for the entire abbreviated 56-game regular season before he returned for the playoffs.

How do the new guys fit in?

Besides Stamkos' departure and Guentzel's arrival, the Lightning roster looks a lot different than it did at the end of last season. Gone is Sergachev, who had been projected as the team's future No. 1 defenseman but was dealt to Utah in a shocking draft-week trade. Tampa Bay received left-shot defenseman J.J. Moser, who is two years younger than Sergachev and makes more than $5 million a year less. Where Moser fits in is unclear, because the Lightning want him to get top-four minutes, which could lead to a switch to the right side.

The Lightning tried to address their forward depth with some veteran signings. Cam Atkinson enters this season highly motivated to show he still has more to show as he enters his 13th NHL season. At age 35, he is coming off an unceremonious parting with the Flyers, who bought out the final year of his contract after a season that saw him in and out of the lineup. He'll have the opportunity to show he can contribute in a middle-six role. Zemgus Girgensons, 30, is a physical presence who can provide some offense to the bottom-six mix.

Prospects knocking on the door

The Lightning haven't had a prospect of Conor Geekie's caliber in years, and his performance in the recently completed rookie showcase did nothing to slow the hype train.

The Lightning enter camp with 12 forwards on NHL deals, and none are waiver-exempt. So, barring injury, it might be tough for someone outside that mix to crack the opening night roster. Still, a few prospects will be knocking on the door and see plenty of ice time this preseason.

Top prospect Conor Geekie headlines the list, so expect to see a lot of him in the preseason in his first year with the franchise after arriving in the Sergachev trade. The Lightning haven't had a prospect of Geekie's caliber in years, and his performance in the recently completed rookie showcase did nothing to slow the hype train. While he stood out on that stage, it will be interesting to see how he does in camp competing against NHL players.

Another prospect to watch is forward Maxim Groshev, who consistently has shined in prospect and developmental camps. He was in the middle of everything during the rookie showcase in Nashville and can make a push toward the top of the Lightning's list of forwards to be summoned from the minors. Last season, seven different prospects made their Tampa Bay debuts, so the opportunity was there.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 09.18.2024

1320459 Florida Panthers

Stanley Cup champion Panthers agree to extend lease deal with Broward County

3-4 minutes 17/09/2024

By TIM REYNOLDS

FORT LAUDERDALE — The Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers are extending their operating agreement with Broward County for five more years, ensuring that the team remains in the market through 2033 and likely well beyond.

County commissioners on Tuesday unanimously approved the revised terms, which include the Panthers giving $51.5 million to eliminate remaining debt on the county-owned arena where the team plays. The current deal runs through 2028.

The updated terms also give the county two five-year options to extend the agreement even further. If those extensions are not picked up, the county will have to return some or all of the $51.5 million debt payment to the Panthers.

"It was important to the county to keep the Panthers in Broward County long term," Panthers President and CEO Matthew Caldwell said. "We're excited about it. It's a great, great step forward for our long-term future."

What was approved Tuesday was a term sheet. Binding documents have yet to be written, though that process is expected to be relatively smooth now that this stage has been cleared. There are concessions from both sides: The county will invest $25 million annually for capital expenditures and expenses related to the operating of Amerant Bank Arena, while the team agreed to have Broward County advertising on player helmets, to continue using local businesses as vendors whenever possible and to donate at least $11.7 million over the next nine years toward local causes and promoting youth hockey.

"Public-private partnerships have to be good for both sides, and this one is," Caldwell said.

The team recently spent well over $65 million to refurbish the War Memorial in Fort Lauderdale, east of the team's game-night home in Sunrise, and turn that building into the franchise's practice facility with new retail and dining options. The exact amount of what the team spent on that project isn't known; $65 million was the budget, and all the Panthers have conceded publicly is that their final costs were much higher.

"People are excited that we're here for the long-term, that we're extending," Caldwell said.

The Panthers, including playoff games, exceeded 1 million in attendance last season for the first time in team history. The team — which struggled with poor attendance and constantly dealt with relocation rumors before the franchise turned around its fortunes — was ninth in the NHL in average regular-season attendance last season.

Michael Udine, one of the county commissioners, said from the dais at Tuesday's meeting that "something special" has happened with the Panthers and the Broward community in recent years.

"When I went to the first hockey game in South Florida about 30 years ago and the ice was melting when you were in the stands, if you would have said in this short period of time that we'd be No. 9 in the NHL during the regular season for attendance, I think people would have thought that you were on drugs," Udine said. "It's a testament to what the Panther organization has done in Broward County and in South Florida."

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1320460 Florida Panthers

Florida Panthers, Broward County Strike Deal to Stay in Sunrise

Published 9 hours ago on September 17, 2024

By George Richards, FHN Publisher

The Florida Panthers and the Broward County Board of Commissioners agreed Tuesday on a lease extension for Amerant Bank Arena which could keep the NHL team in Sunrise through 2043.

The current lease expires on June 30, 2028.

The Panthers will extend their lease at the Sunrise arena for five years until 2033 — with two five-year extensions of which “Broward County has unilateral option to retain Panthers for an additional 10-year period for a total of up to 19 years, at sole discretion of the County.’’

“We want to make sure everyone knows that the Florida Panthers are in Broward County long term,” team president and CEO Matt Caldwell told Florida Hockey Now on Tuesday.

There had been rumors about the team being interested in building a new arena near downtown Fort Lauderdale, but this new agreement appears to put those thoughts to rest at least for now.

While this current five-year extension keeps the Panthers in Sunrise until 2033, the two five-year extensions basically say the team will remain in Broward County.

That could be in Sunrise, or somewhere else.

But, potential new development around the arena — which would be facilitated by the Panthers — would likely keep the team playing right where it is.

With the new agreement, which needs formal commission approval once finalized, Florida owner Vinnie Viola will pay the county $51 million to clear remaining debt stemming from the arena’s construction in the late 1990s.

“We are thrilled to extend what has been an incomparable long-term partnership with Broward County. The county and our team share a deep commitment to investing in a bright future for our community,” Viola said in a statement.

“Our strong partnerships- first and foremost with Broward County, as well as with the cities of Sunrise, Coral Springs and Fort Lauderdale- exemplify the way in which successful public-private partnerships can foster economic growth and cultural vibrancy.”

The Panthers began play at the Sunrise arena, originally named the National Car Rental Center, in 1998.

“The building will be completely debt-free,’’ Caldwell said.

In return for paying off the debt, the Panthers will basically get development rights to the land surrounding the arena back.

In 2015, when the team reworked its lease agreement with the county and began receiving tourism tax dollars, it had surrendered land development rights to Broward County.

Per the new agreement, the Panthers will have four years of exclusive rights to propose development on the massive parking lots which surround the arena.

The Panthers would like to turn some of those parking lots into a mixed-development project which may include housing, retail, offices, a hotel, bars and restaurants.

A number of professional sports teams, most famously the Atlanta Braves and their ‘Battery,’ have created small cities around their arenas and ballparks to not only create revenue but to enhance the fan experience not only when games are being played but when the venues are dark.

If the Panthers do not come up with a development plan, which would need Broward County approval, the development rights revert back to the county.

But if the Panthers and the county agree on a new development plan for the land around the arena, the team would almost certainly remain in Sunrise through 2043 and beyond.

Basically, the team would not invest in building up development around an arena that it would not be playing in.

The arena sits on about 120 acres of land just east of the Sawgrass Expressway and across from the Sawgrass Mills Mall.

About 90 acres of that are surface parking lots which could be developed.

“If a development plan is reached over the next four years, conceivably there would be a longer-term commitment to Sunrise,’’ Caldwell said. “This does not completely close the door for anywhere else in Broward County, but this is a major step to being in Sunrise longterm.’’

This new five-year extension on the current lease basically gives the team time to work on bigger projects around the arena — and if things work out, the team would stay right where it is.

“Right now, we did not want to be running up against the lease expiring while we explore major development,” Caldwell said. “We do not have a plan right now, but we have time to dig into it. This is the next big project.’’

Regardless, the Panthers have committed to playing somewhere in Broward County for the foreseeable future.

With the new lease agreement, Broward County will pay the Panthers $25 million out of the tourism tax deal which was agreed upon in 2015.

The team will have to spend $10 million per year on arena improvements.

The Panthers and Broward County will also continue their marketing agreement for the next four years.

Last season, the Panthers wore ‘Visit Lauderdale’ decals on their helmets and that deal would continue for the next four seasons.

Florida Hockey Now LOADED: 09.18.2024

1320461 Florida Panthers

Florida Panthers, Stanley Cup Visit the Miami Heat

Published 20 hours ago on September 17, 2024

By George Richards, FHN Publisher

Dr. Derick Anderson is a clinical and sports psychologist for both the Florida Panthers and Miami Heat. So, when he got his day with the Stanley Cup, he wanted to share it with both teams.

On Sunday, Dr. Anderson loaded up the Stanley Cup and headed to the Kaseya Center in downtown Miami — and he brought captain Sasha Barkov and center Anton Lundell with him.

The Heat rolled out the red carpet for its guests: Barkov and Lundell got a full tour of the arena, including trips to the Miami locker room and the practice court.

“I was the only one making any shots,’’ Barkov said with a grin on Monday.

Lundell laughed.

“I was hitting shots,” Lundell said. “We were both shooting around, and both of us were hitting shots.”

Both Barkov and Lundell are big basketball fans, and were excited to meet a couple of players including Jaime Jaquez Jr.

Lundell said he enjoyed his time talking with coach Erik Spoelstra.

“It was an awesome experience,’’ Lundell said. “Obviously, a big thank you to Derick Anderson who made that all possible. For him to bring us there … we were Fanboys. It was awesome to see the arena, meet the players and coaches.

“Erik Spoelstra is a legend; He just won the Gold Medal, coached the Heat to those championships. He told us he really followed us, and loved watching us throughout the playoffs and that was awesome to hear from a guy like that. He was very interested in how we were able to stay calm in the Finals under all of that pressure when we went to Game 7. It was great to talk to him. He seems like a very smart man.”

Florida Hockey Now LOADED: 09.18.2024

1320522 Websites

The Athletic / NHL rookie tournaments roundup: Standouts from Maple Leafs, Red Wings, Canucks and more

By The Athletic Staff

NHL rookie tournaments marked the start of a new season over the weekend and The Athletic’s team of reporters were on site(s) to take them in.

Scott Wheeler was in Buffalo for the six-team Prospects Challenge. Corey Pronman was in California for the seven-team Rookie Faceoff. Max Bultman was in Traverse City, Mich., with the Red Wings and Stars. Thomas Drance was in Penticton, B.C., for the four-team Young Stars Classic. Scott Powers and Jeremy Rutherford were in Maryland Heights, Mo., for the three-team Tom Kurvers Prospect Showcase. Kevin Kurz was in Allentown, Penn., for the Rookie Series between the Flyers and Rangers. And Arpon Basu was at the new Prospects Showdown in Montreal between the Canadiens and Maple Leafs. All told, we had eyes on the prospects of 26 different teams.

These tournaments are an important kickoff of NHL training camps and an opportunity for many young players — from top drafted prospects to potential free agent invites/signings — to make a lasting impression.

Here, our writers have compiled their notes on the standouts from each event.

Prospects Challenge (Sabres, Bruins, Blue Jackets, Devils, Senators, Penguins)

Jiři Kulich, C, Sabres: The host Sabres were unquestionably the most talented team on paper at this year’s Prospects Challenge, led by five first-round picks and a four-pack of talented mid-round Russians. Noah Östlund and Konsta Helenius both created a ton of looks and were probably owed more on the stat sheet. Ryan Johnson looked like he played most of last season in the NHL. Isak Rosén looked like a player who led an AHL team in scoring last year and found the score sheet when Östlund and Helenius couldn’t. Vsevolod Komarov and Nikita Novikov looked like potential NHL D someday. Viktor Neuchev’s hands looked quick as ever. But Kulich, despite being the second-youngest of those five first-rounders, looked a clear cut above — like he was ready to play for and win an NHL job with the Sabres. He scored in all three games, scored twice in two of them, pounded his one-timer on the power play and, more importantly, was around and winning pucks, looking really strong.

Harrison Brunicke, RHD, Penguins: The Penguins’ roster had a little more juice than it has in years past thanks to the additions of Rutger McGroarty (who was top billing and answered the bell with points in all three games and a couple of posts, showing his knack for putting himself in good spots and a willingness to go get pucks and finish checks), Vasiliy Ponomarev (who stirred the drink and showed good puck protection for a smaller player), Ville Koivunen (who made plays off the rush and flashed comfort and handling with the puck on his stick in the offensive zone) and Sergei Murashov (who impressed in net), but it was 2024 second-rounder Harrison Brunicke who had people talking. The 18-year-old started the tournament on the Penguins’ third pairing but was their best D all week. He was involved all over the ice with his high-end skating ability and good length, impressing especially off the rush both ways. He transported pucks, joined the play and escaped pressure. He looked confident on the puck and atop the umbrella on PP2. He nearly finished several good looks. He had a third assist on a goal that he started but didn’t get credit for on the score sheet.

I thought he looked like a better pro prospect than first-rounder Owen Pickering. If he can build on this, look for him to play his way onto the 2026 Canadian world junior team — Hockey Canada head Scott Salmond was in the building this week. —Scott Wheeler

Young Stars Classic (Canucks, Jets, Flames, Oilers)

Zayne Parekh, RHD, Flames: The headliner of a wildly young Calgary Flames side at this year’s Penticton Young Stars tournament — the team included just one free agent invite, three full-time AHL players and eight players selected by the club at the 2024 NHL Entry Draft in Vegas this summer — Parekh was nonetheless the most impressive player at this year’s tournament.

It wasn’t a perfect tournament for Parekh by any means. He had an ugly giveaway at three-on-three in overtime of Calgary’s first game of the tournament, coughing up a gimme that the Winnipeg Jets converted on.

The breadth of his talent, physical maturity and hockey IQ, however, was on full display. There were sequences where he was able to stop the cycle in his own end, bodying older players who have appeared in NHL games already. There were others in which he executed composed defensive zone dekes engineering clean exits and helped free a Flames side that was often under duress from their own end.

Parekh’s offensive instincts stood out too. He was a willing and frequent shooter but never really took a slap shot. His preference from the point is to skate in toward the Bowman line, and either change the angle on a sharp wrister or shoot low and accurately for a second-stick opportunity. It took him until his third game to record a point, but the goal he scored was a gorgeous one, and representative of how he attacks goaltenders as a shooter from the point:

More scoring from Flames 2024 first-round picks as Zayne Parekh makes it 2-0! #Flames pic.twitter.com/m0YDxnuNce

— Mackenzie Grafton (@mgrafton37) September 16, 2024

There’s space in Parekh’s game to elevate that wrist shot — which has solid velocity and accuracy — even higher up his set of considerations as an attacking player, but the baseline there is already dynamic.

Aatu Räty, C/LW, Canucks: Center Aatu Räty has often been the forgotten man among Vancouver’s prospect group. Still only 21 years old, and coming off an AHL season in which he caught fire down the stretch, Räty provided a reminder he’s worth keeping an eye on.

Held back largely by his foot speed in his previous North American professional seasons, Räty appears to be somewhat quicker. Given his multiple years of AHL experience, he predictably stood out at this level, but in contrast with many of the other professional standouts — with the exception of Winnipeg Jets forward Brad Lambert — Räty is young enough where dominating at this level should still be meaningful to us, as opposed to an expectation.

While Räty’s best moments as a sophomore player in North American professional hockey came on the wing, the Canucks are intent on continuing to try him out at center for now. He looked the part of a player that could challenge to break camp with an NHL team, or at least have

the chops to be a first call-up option when injuries strike in-season. — Thomas Drance

Rookie Faceoff (Utah, Kings, Sharks, Ducks, Golden Knights, Kraken, Avalanche)

The San Jose Sharks: There wasn't one or two players who clearly stood out for me at the L.A. showcase, so I defaulted to the team that collectively was the most impressive. The Sharks were the No. 2-ranked team in the NHL Pipeline Rankings, and were neck and neck for me with Chicago for the No. 1 position. They showed their depth of young talent at this event. Even with No. 1 pick Macklin Celebrini having an average game by his standards in the first match against Utah, the Sharks played well enough to win. In their second game against a talented Anaheim team, they controlled the game even without Celebrini in the lineup. Will Smith clearly outplayed his Boston College teammate Cutter Gauthier, displaying his dynamic skill and playmaking. Their wingers in Quentin Musty, Collin Graf and Kasper Halttunen made a lot of plays, and Ethan Cardwell stood out at times as well with his hustle and speed. On defense, Luca Cagnoni, while small, showed he could help the offense a lot, and they had a lot of big blueliners who didn't give Anaheim room. — Corey Pronman

Tom Kurvers Prospect Showcase (Wild, Blues, Blackhawks)

Frank Nazar, C/RW, Blackhawks: Outside of Connor Bedard, the Blackhawks aren't likely to have many young players in their NHL lineup to start the season. One prospect who does have a chance to crack the Blackhawks' lineup out of camp is Frank Nazar. At the Tom Kurvers Prospect Showcase, Nazar did his part to show he belonged in that conversation and was the Blackhawks' best player over the two games. He was constantly around the puck, created quality chances for himself and his teammates and made plays in all zones. He finished with a goal and two assists. We'll now see where he takes that. —Scott Powers

Zack Bolduc, LW/RW, Blues: The 2021 first-round pick ended his rookie season with a bang, scoring three goals in the final five games of 2023-24 with the Blues. He realizes that's long forgotten and that he'll be starting from scratch when training camp opens, and he played like he has a lot to prove. He wore the "C" for the Blues and was their best player, showing a lot of poise and improved puck protection, which is an area he worked on this summer. He punctuated his performance with a highlight-reel goal in Sunday's 6-2 win over Minnesota. —Jeremy Rutherford

Prospect Tournament (Red Wings, Stars)

Nate Danielson, C, Red Wings: The Traverse City "tournament" this year was really just a two-game set between Detroit and Dallas, of which Detroit won both games largely on the strength of players who were already pros last year. But one notable exception was Danielson, whose skating and playmaking really stood out, particularly in the second game of the weekend. In the end, he finished with just one assist in two games, but he created a significant number of chances for himself and his teammates. The Red Wings will of course want to see that turn into more point production, and that's been a trend for him the last couple seasons, but his impact on the game was still clear. He'll be of considerable interest this preseason, after a strong exhibition showing for Detroit last fall. —Max Bultman

Prospect Showdown (Canadiens, Maple Leafs)

Lane Hutson, LHD, Canadiens: Hutson dazzled the sold-out Bell Centre crowd on back-to-back days with his shiftiness, elusiveness, passing and dancing on the blue line. He came exactly as advertised and no one on either team stood out more than him over two games. It wasn't even close. Now comes the tricky part: winning a job with the Canadiens out of training camp. Breaking the ankles of guys heading to the AHL or back to junior is one thing; making those same plays against the best players in the world is something entirely different. But what Hutson showed in these two games was his unique talent. No one currently in the NHL plays the game quite like he does.

Easton Cowan, LW, Maple Leafs: Cowan has lots of skill, but that's not what made him stand out in Montreal. It was the pro habits, the proper positioning, the good stick, time after time, shift after shift, with remarkable consistency. He made the plays that needed to be made, even if they were as boring as a dump-in to complete a change. One example: While killing a penalty in the second game of the series, Cowan was skating toward a loose puck near the Maple Leafs blue line with Canadiens defenseman Logan Mailloux giving chase to try and keep it in the offensive zone. Mailloux lowered his stick onto Cowan's, hoping to muscle him off and get the puck. Cowan fought through it and got the puck out anyway, despite giving up about four inches and 30 pounds to Mailloux. He did stuff like this constantly. The skill is good, but it's the pro details that pop, especially in an environment like this. —Arpon Basu

Rookie Series (Rangers, Flyers)

Matvei Michkov, RW, Flyers: Flyers fans who made the approximate 90-minute drive north to see the prized rookie's first game in an orange sweater did not leave disappointed. Michkov was a level above everyone on the ice in terms of skills with the puck and his playmaking, including a power play goal on Friday (he did not play on Saturday). Michkov got better as the game went along, too, culminating in a third period in which he seemed to do something notable on every shift — even attempting an "alley-oop" with 2024 Flyers first-round pick Jett Luchenko. He'll have a head of steam heading into main training camp later this week.

Brett Berard, LW, Rangers: The two-game series didn't end well for Berard, who was tossed in the second period on Saturday for spearing fourth-liner Sawyer Boulton. Prior to that, though, Berard was arguably the most noticeable Rangers forward, helping to generate a power-play goal moments before he was tossed. While he still apparently has work to do when it comes to walking the line between effective pest and taking avoidable penalties — he was also called for roughing early in the first period on Saturday — the puck did seem to follow him around. —Kevin Kurz

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1320523 Websites

ESPN / Burning questions for all 32 NHL teams this preseason - ESPN

Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton

It has been about three months since the Florida Panthers won the Stanley Cup, the 2024 NHL draft was held at the Sphere, and hundreds of players found new homes via free agency.

But as autumn quickly approaches, so too do the NHL preseason and training camps for all 32 teams ahead of opening night on Oct. 8.

To help get you ready for the next few weeks -- as teams decide on which players make the roster, and how their lines, D pairings and goalie tandems will shake out -- here are the biggest lingering questions for each club, courtesy of Ryan S. Clark (Western Conference) and Kristen Shilton (Eastern Conference).

Jump to a team:

ANA | BOS | BUF | CGY

CAR | CHI | COL | CBJ

DAL | DET | EDM | FLA

LA | MIN | MTL | NSH

NJ | NYI | NYR | OTT

PHI | PIT | SJ | SEA

STL | TB | TOR | UT

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How to watch the 2024-25 NHL season on ESPN networks -- including 100 exclusive games and the out-of-market package (over 1,050 games).

Atlantic Division

Boston Bruins

How will the Bruins reshape their top six?

Yes, there is also the question of whether restricted free agent Jeremy Swayman will have a new deal in place to officially take the mantle as Boston's No. 1 goaltender. But that financial stickiness is, as B's captain Brad Marchand said, "part of the business."

The job for Bruins coach Jim Montgomery going into camp is figuring out how to revamp the offense. The Bruins finally landed top center Elias Lindholm in free agency while losing winger Jake DeBrusk to Vancouver. So who will step in to fill that void on the wing? Boston has a prized prospect in Fabian Lysell to keep an eye on, and a formerly bottom-six skater like Morgan Geekie could push for an expanded role.

Lysell is the real one to watch, though. Boston held him out of rookie camp so he would be "extremely ready" for the team's main event. In other words, the Bruins expect he's ready to snag an NHL roster spot for opening night. We'll see if that's the case.

Buffalo Sabres

Was Buffalo right to stand pat offensively?

The Sabres' inactivity in free agency was a head-scratcher. Buffalo didn't add a single notable asset, and it bought out veteran Jeff Skinner's contract to, quite possibly, make them worse up front than they were a season ago.

How will new coach Lindy Ruff piece his forward lines together now? If Jack Quinn can come back strong from an injury-shortened 2023-24 campaign, that would be a huge boost and give Buffalo a potential top-line partner for Alex Tuch and Tage Thompson. A rebounded Dylan Cozens to go with JJ Peterka would also improve the Sabres' prospects.

It remains to be seen though whether Buffalo will suffer from a lack of new talent. GM Kevyn Allen might be able to tell quickly in camp if he was right to bet on Buffalo's incumbents.

Detroit Red Wings

What -- or who -- will be the difference-maker?

The Red Wings have been missing ... something. Despite good talent, a solid structure and, at times, long stretches of momentum last season, Detroit managed to fall just short when it mattered most. How will the Red Wings go about fixing that?

It starts with training camp. Detroit is expecting growth from its young players like Simon Edvinsson, Jonatan Berggren and Carter Mazur. Patrick Kane and Vladimir Tarasenko will need to play key roles as veterans on and off the ice. And other returning stars -- led by captain Dylan Larkin -- have to be better, too.

On the back end, the Red Wings could be minus one significant skater in Moritz Seider. He doesn't have a contract yet (fellow RFA Lucas Raymond signed his new deal on Monday night), and that's a potential distraction the Red Wings can't afford to let derail their progress. Coach Derek Lalonde has enough to sort through as it is identifying how to get Detroit back into the postseason picture.

Florida Panthers

Will two short summers catch up to Panthers?

Florida lost in the Stanley Cup Final two years ago -- only to make up for it with a thrilling Game 7 victory over Edmonton in June to secure the franchise's first championship. That elation bled into a busy -- and decidedly brief -- summer of Cup parties and events that have no doubt kept players from their usual offseason routines. Does that come back to bite Florida as it gets set to defend its title?

While the Panthers used losing to Vegas in 2023 as motivation for redemption the following year, Florida was able to bask in Cup-winning glory the past two months. Certainly no player will be resting on his laurels come training camp, but that is where the first indications of fatigue -- mental or physical -- might be.

Florida wouldn't be the first team to experience it. Many skaters lucky enough to go deep into the playoffs multiple times have said the grind eventually takes its toll. Will that be the Panthers' reality after two long runs?

Montreal Canadiens

How will the defense be built?

The Canadiens are still in the middle of a long-term rebuild. However, there's potential for the team to take significant steps forward -- once they settle on a strong blue line.

Fortunately, the Canadiens have options. The recently extended Kaiden Guhle is a lock for a top-pairing role, while David Savard and Mike Matheson should provide solid veteran presence. It's a full-blown competition for spots from there. Justin Barron, Jordan Harris, Jayden Struble and Arber Xhekaj will all make their case for ice time, and prospect Lane Hutson will show in camp whether he's ready for an NHL gig.

Montreal was tied for No. 27 overall in goals against last season (3.43 per game) and No. 30 in shots against, so finding the right formula on the back end is vital to improving.

Ottawa Senators

Can Travis Green get the Senators to the next level?

Ottawa has -- to put it mildly -- gone through some changes. There has been a new owner, new management and a new coach implemented all in the past 12 months, and a number of fresh faces looking to take roster spots on the ice. That's all been done in the name of helping Ottawa become an actual contender in the Atlantic again.

New bench boss Travis Green is at the center of that mission. Speaking of centers, Green has superb depth there -- from Josh Norris to Tim Stutzle to Shane Pinto -- ready to go, and a healthy Thomas Chabot on the back end.

From there, it's on Green to sift through a landslide of depth options -- Noah Gregor, Nick Cousins, even Nikolay Kulemin -- on offense, and the likes of Jacob Bernard-Docker and Maxence Guenette on defense. Green said his players can expect a tough training camp.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Who fills the Steven Stamkos-sized hole?

The Lightning have entered a new era, and it doesn't include former captain Steven Stamkos. Tampa Bay let the longtime face of the franchise walk in free agency, essentially replacing him with Jake Guentzel.

There's no telling how Stamkos' absence will affect Tampa Bay on the ice and in the locker room, where he'd been a stable presence for more than a decade (and through two Stanley Cup victories). The Lightning have been aggressive in their dealings before, and moving away from Stamkos, trading Mikhail Sergachev to Utah, reeling in Guentzel and even bringing back former defenseman Ryan McDonagh showed GM Julien BriseBoise isn't afraid of making waves.

Training camp will be the first take on a new-look Lightning group and could signal whether Tampa Bay is back on a potential championship track, or proof that too much change isn't a good thing.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Will center depth be a problem?

The Leafs prioritized adding to several areas in the offseason, but center wasn't one of them. Is that going to be a problem for new coach Craig Berube?

Toronto's current lineup has Auston Matthews and John Tavares locked into their top-six pivot spots. After that, it's anyone's guess how Berube is going to fill in those gaps.

Naturally, the idea of William Nylander sliding back to center has surfaced. It's an experiment the Leafs have gone back to -- with varied results -- at least once a season for years. Max Domi had success at center last season as an injury replacement but he wouldn't be a long-term solution for a job. And David Kampf is stronger in a fourth-line position.

So what will Toronto do? Turn to Pontus Holmberg or Fraser Minten? The team has to think Berube's fresh eyes on the roster will help in finding a quick solution.

Metropolitan Division

Carolina Hurricanes

After offseason losses, is there enough defensive depth?

The Hurricanes enter training camp without Brady Skjei and Brett Pesce, two previous stalwarts on their blue line who played heavy minutes. Those are mighty big skates to fill.

Carolina made some free agent acquisitions for the back end, bringing back Shayne Gostisbehere and inking veteran Sean Walker. Jaccob Slavin will be an expected star on the defense, too, and Dmitry Orlov will play big minutes. But what about the aging Brent Burns? Can he still play an effective role to keep Slavin from burning out? Will Jalen Chatfield carry a larger load?

Carolina has prospects waiting in the wings, but rushing them with too much responsibility could backfire. The Hurricanes' history as a heavy, defensive group could be shifting this season -- and might unveil a whole new identity for a team that's perennially knocking on the door of a Cup Final bid.

Columbus Blue Jackets

How will the offense be redefined?

The Blue Jackets will have an open competition for roster spots when training camp opens, but the offensive possibilities are intriguing. The Blue Jackets signed veteran Sean Monahan, while Patrik Laine and Alexandre Texier have exited. Monahan had 26 goals and 59 points last season, proving he can still have an impact in the right role. That's good news for Columbus. Adding veteran James van Riemsdyk on a one-year deal gives Columbus depth.

The Blue Jackets are obviously grieving the loss of Johnny Gaudreau, whose tragic death leaves an irreplaceable void in their organization. Columbus has to figure out who can help it light the lamp and improve on an offense that ranked 25th in the NHL in 2023-24, averaging fewer than three goals per game.

Can Kent Johnson come back strong from a poor 2023-24 campaign and offseason surgery? That would help. The Blue Jackets dealt with consecutive years of poor injury luck that limited the availability of top skaters, including Boone Jenner and Adam Fantilli. Both of them will need to thrive in significant roles for Columbus to make progress this season.

New Jersey Devils

How will Sheldon Keefe get the team back on track?

The Devils missed out on a playoff berth last season. It's partially why GM Tom Fitzgerald needed to find a new coach, tapping Sheldon Keefe for the job. Keefe's resume includes four consecutive trips to the playoffs in his first NHL head-coaching stint with the Maple Leafs. He has experience managing young talent, something with which New Jersey is stocked.

On paper, it appears Keefe and the Devils are an ideal fit. Training camp will start to reveal whether that's truly the case.

This is Keefe's first professional opportunity outside Toronto -- he was the organization's AHL coach for five years before taking over behind the Leafs' bench -- and there will be a learning curve in New Jersey. Keefe might even have more rising stars to juggle now than ever. Will the Devils embrace Keefe's style and thrive? That answer will define New Jersey's success.

New York Islanders

Can they score enough goals?

The Islanders' most pressing problem now or at any point in the season would be an injury to goalie Ilya Sorokin. New York's coach Patrick Roy revealed Sorokin had offseason back surgery that was not "the perfect thing" but Roy said he "thinks [Sorokin] will be fine....when he's ready, he'll help us." GM Lou Lamoriello said previously that the injury is not something the team is "concerned" about, and Sorokin should be available at some point during camp.

Let's assume that's the case and move onto familiar territory for the Islanders: scoring ... or a lack of it.

New York's 22nd-ranked offense last season barely got it into the playoffs (Sorokin was a primary catalyst in that feat). Lamoriello signed Anthony Duclair and Maxim Tsyplakov (a 30-goal scorer in the KHL last season) after New York's first-round postseason exit. But it raises the same questions; do the Islanders expect that's enough to enliven their offense? We'll see.

New York Rangers

Is Jacob Trouba poised to bounce back?

The Rangers have an established roster at this stage. Other than settling on their top-line right winger -- a position that was constantly in flux last season -- there's a pretty clear picture for the rest of the lineup.

What's less obvious is how captain Jacob Trouba will bounce back from last season's slide into a third-pairing slot, a lackluster playoff performance, and a long offseason of trade rumors. Trouba suffered an injury late last season that impacted his play down the stretch, so health is a primary factor in any sort of comeback attempt.

And that's what New York needs from him. It doesn't mean Trouba has to carry 24 minutes per game. He just has to make positive impact plays at even strength and on special teams, to be the difference-making defenseman the Rangers obviously still believe he can be.

Philadelphia Flyers

What is the Flyers' identity?

There's a lot going on in Philadelphia. The Flyers have an exciting talent in Matvei Michkov who's already impressed his new coaches during rookie camp. Where might Michkov fit into Philadelphia's offense out of the gate, and how big a role will coach John Tortorella allow for him?

On that note, the Flyers are figuring out their center situation as well, with moving parts to slot into potentially new roles -- does Morgan Frost finally get a larger opportunity?

Defensively, the Flyers have an unknown in Rasmus Ristolainen given his health following triceps surgery. It all feels a little unsettled. Which is why, of course, training camp will be critical for Philadelphia to start building a foundation.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Who will be the starting goaltender?

Pittsburgh enters training camp without a clear-cut starter. Tristan Jarry held the No. 1 job for much of last season, but was replaced by backup Alex Nedeljkovic for the final 13 games. Nedeljkovic was an impressive 8-1-3 over that stretch, and his strong finish helped earn a two-year extension with the Penguins. He'll battle Jarry for a top spot on the depth chart during camp.

At the same time, Pittsburgh must also consider Joel Blomqvist's development following a standout season in the AHL, with top-five finishes in several major statistical categories. Managing each of their goalies will be critical for Pittsburgh's success in the short and long term. Camp will be the place for each goaltender to showcase his best work.

Washington Capitals

How will the newcomers fit in?

The Capitals are banking that a third trade is the charm for center Pierre Luc-Dubois, as he is a potential top-line center following his acquisition from Los Angeles this summer. The Capitals are hoping that Dubois can return to that level and perform like he did in 2022-23 for the Jets (posting a career-high 63 points in 73 games).

Beyond Dubois, Washington added Andrew Mangiapane, Brandon Duhaime and Taylor Raddysh to work into the rotation up front, and Jakob Chychrun and Matt Roy to bolster the defense. Logan Thompson also arrived via offseason trade to give Washington a one-two punch with Charlie Lindgren in net.

It's a significant number of new faces, and the Capitals are also dealing with uncertainty surrounding T.J. Oshie's future -- will he be back this season? -- and too much depth is a problem every team would like to have. The only question is how the Capitals will go about using theirs.

Central Division

Chicago Blackhawks

How will this season impact their long-term plans?

There's no question the Blackhawks are staging a promising rebuild, and their offseason moves raise questions about the speed at which they'll be truly competitive again. Adding several veterans -- such as Tyler Bertuzzi, Laurent Brossoit and Teuvo Teravainen, among others -- could help with addressing the deficiencies that made them one of the NHL's worst teams last season. So could the return of a fully healthy Taylor Hall, who sustained a knee injury last November.

Plus, this will be a pivotal season in the development of young cornerstones such as Connor Bedard, Kevin Korchinski, Philipp Kurashev and Alex Vlasic.

Finding cohesion among all those moving parts could see them finish with more than 70 points for the first time since the 2019-20 season. And if not, it could result in some of those veterans being moved at the trade deadline.

Colorado Avalanche

Is the supporting cast strong enough?

Performing well in the regular season isn't the issue for the Avalanche; they finished with more than 107 points the past two seasons. The playoffs, however, are another discussion altogether.

Since winning the Stanley Cup in 2022, they've hit a wall in two straight postseasons. One of the reasons for their struggles stems from a lack of consistent secondary and tertiary scoring. Having that supplementary support allowed them to beat the Jets in five games, only to lose to the Stars in six, scoring only six goals in the final four games of the series (three coming in one game).

Being in a championship window means that a front office must find solutions without significant cap space. The Avs added around the edges in the offseason, but it's also what makes the situations with Gabriel Landeskog, Nikolai Kovalenko, Logan O'Connor and Valeri Nichushkin so crucial. Their collective contributions could play a sizable role in the Avs' bid for the fourth Stanley Cup in franchise history -- or they could be looking for help at the deadline.

Dallas Stars

Is this the Stars' best Cup chance with this core?

Every championship challenger is forced to navigate the salary cap and must get creative. One of the ways the Stars have been creative with their cap challenges is having at least one player on an entry-level contract perform in a significant role. Alleviating their cap challenges with those sorts of players does come with a long-term problem: Eventually, they need to sign those players to bigger deals.

That process has already started for Dallas with defenseman Thomas Harley, who is an unsigned RFA after his rookie contract expired. It will continue with Mavrik Bourque and Wyatt Johnston, who are entering the final year of their ELCs. Goalie Jake Oettinger is also a pending RFA, and his next deal could be sizable.

Meanwhile, captain Jamie Benn and Matt Duchene are among the team's six-player UFA class next summer. There is certainly pressure on this group to excel given those realities.

Minnesota Wild

Do they have enough?

Enough scoring? Enough players who can stay healthy? Enough depth to take on another injury crisis?

Granted, that's more than just one question, but these are some of the more imperative ones in assessing whether the Wild have enough to make the playoffs.

Last season the Wild finished 21st in goals per game, and rookies Brock Faber and Marco Rossi were the only players on their roster to play in all 82 games. With their cap limitations, their major signing this summer was Yakov Trenin, who has hit double figures in goals in each of the past three seasons.

But can Trenin, along with incoming rookie Marat Khusnutdinov, provide another layer of scoring and stability needed for a team that saw 59% of its goals come from five players last season? And would that be enough to reach the playoffs?

Nashville Predators

After massive additions, what's a realistic expectation?

Even with their first-round exit, the Predators had a clear identity. They were a two-way team that just needed more goals and players who had significant playoff experience. So what are they now? That's where it gets interesting.

At minimum, the Predators remain a playoff-caliber team, and should be aiming for a top-three spot in the Central instead of the wild card. Beyond that is where the intrigue lies.

Adding Jonathan Marchessault, Brady Skjei and Steven Stamkos signals that the Predators are in win-now mode. What separates the Predators from a crowded field in the Western Conference appears to be cohesion. Both the Avalanche and Golden Knights had years to find the right combination needed to win a title. The same applies to the Oilers and the Stars, as they seek to find the configurations that could see them win it all.

So are the Preds in that class of teams that's capable of winning a Stanley Cup in 2024-25? Or are they in that next tier below, where there might be one or two details they need to address before cementing their status as a legit championship challenger?

St. Louis Blues

Have the defensive issues finally been solved?

This is a question that has plagued the Blues for the past two seasons, with the acknowledgment that there is rarely a quick solution. Shuffling their defensive corps wasn't a real option considering they have four defensemen each making more than $4 million annually who all have no-trade clauses.

Instead, the tactical adjustments started in the 2023 offseason, when they hired assistant coach Mike Weber to oversee their defensive overhaul. Even when Drew Bannister took over during the 2023-24 season, the Blues allowed the fourth-most high-danger chances per 60 minutes, the fifth-most shots per 60, and the sixth-most scoring chances per 60. The reason they remained in the wild-card hunt was that their goalies finished with the fifth-best team save percentage under Bannister's watch.

This summer, GM Doug Armstrong added two-way forwards such as Radek Faksa, Mathieu Joseph and Alexandre Texier, while also acquiring defensemen such as Philip Broberg, Pierre-Olivier Joseph and Ryan Suter, with Torey Krug lost for the year because of ankle surgery. Will the results be different?

Utah Hockey Club

Can they make the playoffs in their first season?

New franchises can get into the playoffs early in their existence. The Golden Knights made the Cup Final in their first season, while the Kraken made it to the second round in their sophomore campaign. Could Utah could make the playoffs in its first season?

Utah coach Andre Tourigny has a strong familiarity with several players on the roster given he coached more than a dozen of them when he was in charge of the Arizona Coyotes last season. Tourigny had the Coyotes challenging for a playoff spot through late January, until a 14-game losing streak derailed those aspirations. Coupled with offseason defensive additions such as Ian Cole, John Marino and Mikhail Sergachev, there's belief Utah could challenge for a wild-card spot.

If that's not enough, Utah GM Bill Armstrong has more than $9 million in cap space to strengthen the roster with impact additions.

Winnipeg Jets

How will Scott Arniel put his stamp on the team?

There are teams that are judged by what they do in the playoffs. There are teams that are judged on whether or not they reach the playoffs. It appears the Jets might be somewhere in the middle when it comes to what they can accomplish now that Arniel has gone from an assistant under Rick Bowness to head coach.

Part of the challenge facing Arniel is how to get the Jets beyond the first round. The past two postseasons have shown a similar pattern: The Jets

scored at least five goals to win the opening game, only to then lose the next four en route to an early exit.

But before that, there's a question of whether the Jets will claim one of the three divisional playoff spots or be among the teams going for a wild card. The Avs and Stars look like top Cup contenders, while an aggressive offseason could see the Predators force the issue. Arniel can't simply put the team in cruise control and expect to make the postseason again.

Pacific Division

Anaheim Ducks

Can they eclipse 30 wins in Greg Cronin's second season?

Every rebuild has its nuances, but all seek some signs of progress. For the Ducks, one of those benchmarks is winning 30 games or more. They were one of four teams last season that won fewer than 30, and have surpassed the 30-win mark just once in the past five years.

A big thing that prevented the Ducks from hitting the mark in Cronin's first season were the lengthy losing streaks -- the Ducks had five stretches in which they lost more than five in a row. Then there's how they lost those games. The Ducks had 23 games in which they allowed more than three goals, and nearly half of those games saw them lose by more than three. Getting the details down better in Year 2 for Cronin should lead to better results and some steps in the right direction.

Calgary Flames

What is the Flames' identity?

A year ago, the Flames were in a state of flux. They didn't know what players were staying or going, despite having several players who were under contract for more than two years.

After maneuvering the roster challenges, the Flames appeared to find an identity: They were seven points out of the wild-card spot by early March, only to lose eight of their next 10 games, which effectively took them out of the playoff conversation. But they were able to get a stronger feel for in-season acquisitions Andrei Kuzmenko and Daniil Miromanov, and see how homegrown talents such as Matt Coronato and Dustin Wolf performed.

Those players -- along with the Flames' offseason additions -- will play a key part in assessing their short- and long-term identity, and whether a playoff berth is in the cards.

Edmonton Oilers

Is this the best Oilers team in the Connor McDavid-Leon Draisaitl era?

Everything the front office did this offseason was focused on winning that 16th playoff game and capturing an elusive sixth championship. That includes signing UFA forwards Viktor Arvidsson and Jeff Skinner, while returning a number of veterans and inking Draisaitl to a $112 million contract that kicks in for 2025-26.

All of it came with a cost: The Oilers couldn't afford to keep homegrown talents such as Vincent Desharnais, who left in free agency, while Philip Broberg and Dylan Holloway signed offer sheets with the Blues that the Oilers didn't match. While those decisions led to questions in the short term, the concerns won't matter as much if this season ends with the Oilers winning the Cup.

Los Angeles Kings

Is Darcy Kuemper the solution to the goaltending woes?

As the Kings continue to struggle to get out of the first round, one of the issues is their goaltending. They've gone through Cal Petersen, Jonathan Quick, Pheonix Copley, Joonas Korpisalo, David Rittich and Cam Talbot, with the belief that one of them could be the answer only to end up still asking the same question.

That's what made getting a Cup winner in Kuemper in exchange for Pierre-Luc Dubois rather intriguing. Kuemper was arguably the biggest reason the Coyotes made it out of the opening round in the 2020 bubble playoffs. He also played a key role in the Avs' Cup victory back in 2022. The Kings are banking on the fact that Kuemper could help them get into (and beyond) the second round, knowing another early exit would mark their fourth straight.

While those factors made it one of the worst seasons in franchise history, it has paved the way for their current situation.

It starts with hiring a new head coach in Ryan Warsofsky. They won the draft lottery and used the No. 1 pick to draft Macklin Celebrini, pairing him with 2023 No. 4 pick Will Smith to serve as the faces of their franchise. They also added veterans such as Cody Ceci, Barclay Goodrow, Tyler Toffoli and Jake Walman, and traded for a long-term franchise goalie in Yaroslav Askarov.

With these moves, there's belief that the rebuilding Sharks will be much better than the basement-dwelling version of a season ago.

Seattle Kraken

Can a new coaching staff solve old problems?

The Kraken were a win away from the Western Conference finals in their second season. But last season, they had the fourth-lowest shooting percentage in the league coupled with general inconsistency, which is why they missed the playoffs and subsequently made an offseason coaching change.

They hired former Penguins and Sabres coach Dan Bylsma to take over after he and his staff took the Kraken's AHL affiliate to consecutive Calder Cup finals on the strength of one of the league's most prolific offenses.

Promoting Bylsma along with assistant coach Jessica Campbell, the first woman to be behind a bench in NHL history, was done with the belief that their AHL success can help the Kraken rediscover their scoring touch and challenge for a playoff spot.

Vancouver Canucks

In which direction are the Canucks heading?

Progress has been at the forefront ever since the Canucks hired coach Rick Tocchet. He won 20 of the first 36 games after replacing Bruce Boudreau in 2022. He led them to a 109-point season, winning the Pacific Division and coming within a victory of advancing to the Western Conference finals. And they did it all while missing star goalie Thatcher Demko for a substantial portion of the season.

So what's next? Building on that momentum -- or regression?

While the Canucks lost Elias Lindholm and Nikita Zadorov in free agency, they have the rest of their core intact. They used the offseason to add more scoring, while supplementing their defensive group as well. It all sets the Canucks up to be one of the teams to watch in the West; this season could be defined by more progress -- or a lack thereof.

Vegas Golden Knights

How will the new-look Golden Knights fare?

Change is nothing new for the Golden Knights. If anything, managing everything that comes with change has been the constant for a franchise that has been defined by its win-at-all-costs mentality.

The Golden Knights lost seven players in the offseason, and six of them were on the Stanley Cup-winning roster. They now have 13 players remaining from that championship team. Much of the core is intact, but Conn Smythe winner -- and original Golden Misfit Jonathan Marchessault -- was among those who are now playing elsewhere.

All of that talent and experience heading out the door raises questions: How will Victor Olofsson fit within their forward rotation? What sort of impact will Alexander Holtz have? Which version of Ilya Samsonov will they have in a goaltending tandem with Adin Hill?

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Sportsnet.ca / Q&A with Canucks GM Patrik Allvin: On winning, Pettersson, and practice habits

Iain MacIntyre

PENTICTON, B.C. — During a dinner out in Nashville last April between Games 3 and 4 of the Vancouver Canucks' first-round playoff series against the Predators, Canuck coach Rick Tocchet began talking about training camp in September.

According to general manager Patrik Allvin, who sat across the table from Tocchet, that's how long the organization has been preparing for elevated expectations and higher standards this season, and making sure last year's 109-point breakthrough was not a one-off.

In a sitdown interview with Sportsnet during the Canucks' Young Stars tournament in Penticton, B.C., on the weekend, Allvin said he sees no signs of complacency from players about last season's success.

He talked about practising better, the scope of off-season changes, getting more from Elias Pettersson, waiting to start negotiations on new contracts for Brock Boeser — and Tocchet — and, of course, who we're all talking about ahead of the opening of training camp here Thursday: goalie Thatcher Demko.

Our interview has been edited slightly for clarity and brevity.

Sportsnet: Winning can be as challenging to deal with as losing. Are you concerned about how your team will handle success?

Allvin: The good thing with the group of coaches and the players we have here is that we are never satisfied. We always want to push forward. Toc and Sergei Gonchar and myself were going for dinner between Game 3 and Game 4 in Nashville, and Toc started to talk about training camp, the preparation. He was eager, like, 'What should we implement in training camp next year?' That was between Games 3 and 4. I think we're always trying to stay ahead of things and always trying to find areas how we can improve and get better. I think as a team we took a step last year, but I don't think we're satisfied where we ended. So I think the players are hungry and they want more.

Sportsnet: You've won Stanley Cups as a manager. Rick Tocchet, Sergei Gonchar and Adam Foote have won Stanley Cups. But many of your players had never played Stanley Cup playoff games in front of fans before last season. Is there a risk that they think the hardest part is over?

Allvin: I sure hope not. I do believe that our coaching staff will stay on top of it, and I think they've done a great job during the summer being in touch with the players and communicating and sending messages and stuff. I sure don't feel that we have that kind of group here."

Sportsnet: You signed six players in free agency, including four wingers to help scoring, depth and balance. Was this more turnover than you expected from a 50-win team?

Allvin: When individual players are part of a team's success, then obviously their stocks are rising. Some of them are obviously getting paid, which they deserve. We tried to keep some of the players that walked away. But I also felt that we, as a staff, had our vision set on what we needed to address, and who our target players were in free agency.

Sportsnet: You certainly seemed to get the players you wanted on July 1, starting with winger Jake DeBrusk. Will the new guys keep the atmosphere fresh at camp and perhaps ensure there is no complacency?

Allvin: I definitely think so. Just after signing those players, when I talked to Petey (Pettersson) and J.T. Miller and Quinn (Hughes) and updated them on the signings, I think they were excited about it. The players we brought in, they expressed heavily their interest in coming to Vancouver and playing for the Canucks, playing for Toc. They acknowledged the style that we played would fit their style (and help them) take the next step, too.

Sportsnet: Hughes won the Norris Trophy and Filip Hronek had a breakthrough season on defence, Miller had 103 points, Brock Boeser scored 40 goals and Thatcher Demko was a runner-up for the Vezina. Among your core players, is Elias Pettersson, after his difficult second half last year, the X-factor for this season?

Allvin: I definitely need him back to another level, which he's capable of. We all know that. I think he's extremely hungry to show that. You know, he's a proud person and player, and I'm pretty sure that he has set his individual goal and mindset at a different level here. I think he's really eager to come back and show everyone that he's capable of playing consistently.

Sportsnet: Were you surprised how much he struggled last spring, especially after signing his $92.8-million extension?

Allvin: I don't know if I was surprised. But, you know, the contract negotiations were hanging over him … and could maybe see it was a little bit of relief after that. Maybe he took his foot off the gas a little bit. But I also think for a lot of the players, this was really their first time playing in the playoffs with 18,000 fans, and travelling, and how hard (playoff games are). It's different. I believe every single member of that core you talked about will come back and even push to another level. Same with Quinn, I think he can learn from some of the things that he dealt with during the playoffs to become a better player.

Sportsnet: In our first conversation after you became GM in January, 2022, you talked about the Canucks needing better practice habits. Tocchet told us this weekend that the core players have to step up in practice. Is this still an issue?

Allvin: I believe in order to become a better team, our practice habits still need to get to another level consistently. And I think that's where Toc and his staff are working hard with the players, the understanding.

Sportsnet: But the players have to take ownership of this, don't they? It can't always be about the coach pushing them?

Allvin: Absolutely, absolutely. On the good teams, the best players are the best players every single day. That's how you become a good team.

Sportsnet: How much contact did you have with Pettersson over the summer?

Allvin: I checked in with him a couple times. He's very excited, very positive. He came into Vancouver early and wanted to be part of the group (for captain's skates) and get to know the new players. He was extremely eager.

Sportsnet: We're all hoping for news this week about Thatcher Demko's status. But clearly, things haven't gone as you envisioned when you told reporters on July 1 that his recovery from a knee injury was progressing and Demko shouldn't require any further medical procedures. What do you know about his readiness for camp?

Allvin: I will know more here in the next couple days when they have their medicals and we see if he's ready to go or not. Again, he was to be medically cleared for the next potential round (had we beaten Edmonton in Round 2 in May). That being said, it's one thing when you're medically cleared and one thing when the coach feels you're ready to go. But Thatcher was supposed to be medically cleared.

Sportsnet: Has his status been keeping you awake at night?

Allvin: I mean, he's a big part of our team, obviously. We need him to be healthy. I think my job, again, is to look at every position and try to be ahead of things.

Sportsnet: Are you still watching the NHL market to see if another goalie becomes available?

(Editor's note: The Canucks announced Sunday night that goalie Dylan Ferguson would be at training camp on a PTO).

Allvin: We want to have six goalies at camp here. That's our goal. So if some of them are not ready to go, we will add another goalie. Toc wants to have two groups (for camp), A and B, and then kind of a younger C group.

Sportsnet: How important is it to preserve the little bit of salary-cap flexibility you finally have and not start another season shackled by Long Term Injured Reserve?

Allvin: Operating in long-term injury reserve, it's hard. It was hard last year. At this point, we have different ideas and different options to stay out of it.

Sportsnet: Will it be tempting to spend that money before the season if another NHL player you like — say, a goalie — becomes available?

Allvin: We're happy where we are right now. As always, if something comes up. . . we'll definitely look into the options. But once you get into LTIR, once you set the roster, basically that's what you have.

Sportsnet: Is it still the organization's plan to wait until after this season to re-sign your coach?

Allvin: We have a club option for next year. I think with the relationship we have (with Tocchet) and the trust we have and the communication, I think when the time is right for both of us, and then obviously the ownership, we'll look into that.

Sportsnet: What about Boeser, who is in the final year of his contract?

Allvin: Brock, first and foremost, we're really pleased to see him trending towards being cleared and healthy here (after developing blood clots during the playoffs). And I'm glad for him that everything has gone well. That being said, I'm expecting him to continue where he finished off last year, find the consistency and play good hockey for us. I have a good relationship with his agent, Ben Hankinson, and we'll see when the time is right.

Sportsnet: But you have to make a decision before the trade deadline, right?

Allvin: Yeah.

Sportsnet: With all that has happened, does it feel like you've been on the job longer than 2½ years?

Allvin: Absolutely.

Sportsnet: Are you farther ahead than you thought you would be?

Allvin: Good question. I think we as an organization have taken steps in the building process, getting the right people in, having a core, which makes it easier to then surround the players with … complementary players. I feel over the 2½ years, we have more depth, which I'm very pleased with. I don't think I really envisioned anything more than getting into the grind and just seeing how we can get there.

Sportsnet: Can you get to a Stanley Cup this season?

Allvin: I do think we are capable to challenge for the Stanley Cup, absolutely. But I'm going to use what (president of hockey operations) Jim Rutherford said last year: Everything needs to go right for us in order to be there. This year there's going to be a different expectation. The other teams are going to be ready to play the Vancouver Canucks from Day 1. So we better be up for the task, and we better be ready here starting on Thursday.

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Sportsnet.ca / Why new arena is complex, critical component to Atlanta's NHL return

Scott Burnside

ATLANTA — One of the first people Frank Ferrara met when he came to the Atlanta area to help revive dreams of a return of a National Hockey League team to this sprawling southern city was former NHL player and local businessman Tim Ecclestone.

Ecclestone was known simply as 'Coach' to his friends and that is what Ecclestone became to Ferrara, who was the driving force behind the dramatic rise of Arizona State University as a Division-1 hockey team and the construction of Mullett Arena.

Ferrara is now the right-hand man to billionaire automative mogul Vernon Krause, the main investor in one of two groups hoping to land an expansion franchise and bring NHL hockey back to Atlanta for what would be an unprecedented third go-round.

Ecclestone regularly shared with Ferrara his contacts in the tight-knit Atlanta hockey community and his insights into the game. Ecclestone also shared his enthusiasm for the project and his belief that NHL hockey could and would thrive in Atlanta given proper ownership and a better arena location.

"He really was a bit of my window into what the local market is about," Ferrara said.

The last time the two spoke they made plans to get together for dinner and, in a bit of fancy, the former player and coach asked Ferrara who he thought the new team's first opponent might be on opening night in Georgia and what ideas Ferrara liked for a new name for an expansion team.

Ecclestone died at age 76 in March.

"He said, 'I just can't wait for opening night,'" Ferrara recalled. "He said, 'People have been waiting so long for this.'

"I'm left with the feeling of how important this is to the ardent NHL fans there," he added.

Ecclestone's dreams of bringing the NHL back to Atlanta didn't die with him, though, as Ferrara keeps them close as the Krause team tries to navigate the difficult path to an expansion team.

"We lost something we couldn't afford to lose when he passed in early March," Ferrara told Sportsnet in a lengthy interview. "When we pull this off, he will be with us in spirit."

This is the human, the emotional side, of the expansion debate not just as it relates to Atlanta but all the other markets that are covetous of having an NHL team in their backyard.

As important as those narratives are, they don't pay the freight. And there is much freight to be paid if NHL hockey is coming back to Atlanta.

Ferrara spent two decades working on the financial side with the National Football League and was lured to Arizona where he helped build Mullett Arena as the permanent home to the Sun Devils' D-1 men's hockey team. The arena was also home for two seasons to the NHL's Arizona Coyotes before the team moved abruptly this off-season to Utah.

Several years ago Ferrara was approached by Krause, a self-professed diehard Atlanta Thrashers fan who wasn't in a position to take a run at owning the Thrashers when they departed in the summer of 2011 for Winnipeg, about his dream of returning the NHL to the area.

He is in such a position now and is the main man behind a multi-billion-dollar project in Forsyth County, north of the city.

"He comes at this with the spirit of a fan, like me. He's got a lot of passion for the sport in making it better," Ferrara said of Krause.

"When I saw the project, I was more than intrigued."

It seems almost certain the NHL is going to forge ahead and add teams to its current 32-franchise roster.

There are just too many opportunities and too much money at stake for the league not to.

Vegas paid an expansion fee of $500 million and went to a Stanley Cup Final in its first season, 2017-18.

A couple of years later, Seattle paid $650 million for the right to join the NHL club and three seasons (and one playoff appearance) later, the team is a roaring success.

Financial experts agree the price tag for Team 33, which would make the NHL the most populous of all four major sports leagues, will be in excess of $1 billion.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly told reporters at the recent NHL player media tour in Las Vegas that he doesn't believe the league has reached its ceiling in terms of the number of teams.

So, it's not a matter of 'if' for expansion, but where.

Arizona? Houston? Atlanta? Toronto (part two)? Quebec City?

The NHL's current map features seven Canadian cities and two American markets with multiple teams (New York area with three teams and two in the Los Angeles area).

That, Daly pointed out, leaves significant openings in the U.S. for the NHL to consider.

According to Nielsen's Designated Market Areas, Houston ranks sixth in the United States, Atlanta seventh and Phoenix 11th.

Those three high-profile cities represent the largest markets that don't have an NHL team, now that the Arizona Coyotes have been sold and will begin play this season in Utah.

Reading the tea leaves, it seems certain the next expansion step or steps by the NHL will be in the United States.

Here's the tricky part.

How does the NHL go about identifying a new market, given that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for any group to simply forge ahead and build an arena on spec, hoping the league will find its project to its liking and bestow a franchise upon them?

It seems inconceivable, for instance, that either of the Atlanta groups (the other is led by former player Anson Carter) could or would proceed with construction of a new arena and attendant retail, residential or commercial development that would surround a new arena, without NHL assurances that they would be the pick to host an expansion team.

The Krause project, known as The Gathering at South Forsyth, has been in discussion with local politicians about a level of local funding for the project. The amount of local money potentially available to Krause and his group has declined from $390 million to $225 million, and any local monies for the project are contingent on The Gathering being named by the NHL as having been awarded a franchise.

Local voters will be asked in November to vote on a funding mechanism to pay back the $225 million earmarked for The Gathering, although the outcome of that vote will not impact the Krause group's ability to move forward with the plan, Ferrara said.

The Gathering development, which covers 100 acres, is expected to cost around $3 billion: $1 billion for the arena itself, with $2 billion for the surrounding development. That's a $3-billion commitment before the NHL expansion fee.

That leaves the group in a kind of limbo as it waits for more clear directives from the NHL as the league plots its next moves, perhaps as early as Oct. 1, when the NHL Board of Governors meet next in New York.

"I'm very optimistic, actually," Ferrara said. "I believe in our location."

Carter's group, likewise, has an ambitious plan for its property in Alpharetta, a few miles south of The Gathering but north of the city's I-285 perimeter highway, including access to mass transit, a practice facility and a possible soccer facility.

Like the Krause group, Carter's group believes it has hit on the perfect location for a new NHL facility.

One thing favouring Atlanta, apart from the size of the market and the deep and wealthy business community, is that the NHL would be expanding into a market where a team will play in a facility designed for NHL hockey.

That's not going to be the case in Utah, where the Utah Hockey Club will play at the Delta Center, home to the National Basketball Association's Jazz, with a retrofit to the building to make it more hockey friendly scheduled for down the road.

A similar retrofit would be required if the NHL expanded into an existing NBA building in Houston, or if a new team in Arizona partnered with the NBA Suns in Phoenix.

Given the NHL's checkered history in Atlanta, though, what is the league's appetite to give the go-ahead to a group there, knowing that neither potential ownership group is likely to move forward with construction without the league's approval?

It is the classic chicken-egg debate.

"That could be the critical component," said Carter, one of the top analysts on the NHL's U.S. national broadcast team at Turner Sports, which is also based in Atlanta.

The pressure is on both Atlanta groups, and frankly any group wanting a new NHL team, to present a package that is wholly pleasing to the NHL, both physically and financially, that might sway them toward granting an expansion franchise.

"I wouldn't commit to any group if they couldn't build," Carter said. "Otherwise, you'd have Arizona 2.0."

That's a reference to the myriad arena issues in Arizona that dogged the franchise from the moment it arrived from Winnipeg in the summer of 1996 to the moment it abruptly left this off-season for Utah.

So, how does the league reconcile the desire to ensure new owners provide an elite place to play, a la Vegas and Seattle, with the fact the costs of construction plus the expansion fees are so high, no one may be able to put shovel to ground without first getting the NHL's backing?

"I'm sure they (NHL officials) put themselves in my shoes, too," Carter added. "I definitely see it from both sides."

T-Mobile Center was being built by AEG and MGM Resorts before Vegas was awarded an expansion franchise. But the Vegas dynamic is different than other U.S. markets. The belief was that if the NHL turned away from Vegas as a market, the building could stand on its own.

Could a new arena turn a profit in Atlanta without the NHL as an anchor tenant and with the NBA Hawks not going anywhere from their current downtown location? Unlikely.

Still with Vegas, owner Bill Foley was given permission to launch a trial season-ticket drive before being awarded an expansion franchise, which was a roaring success, ultimately whetting the appetites of local fans and NHL owners alike, and setting the stage for the historic expansion into Vegas.

Would something like that help sway the NHL to make a decision in Atlanta?

Daly wouldn't rule out a trial season-ticket run, although neither Atlanta group has broached the topic with the league.

"I think that would be easy," Ferrara said. "I think there would be overwhelming demand."

Still, as much as Carter and Ferrara believe fervently the Atlanta market would be successful, their respective groups remain in some ways at the mercy of the NHL and its own due diligence about how to proceed.

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1320526 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Senators arena FAQ: How LeBreton Flats can become reality

Wayne Scanlan

The launch of training camp is always a big deal for the Ottawa Senators and their fans.

If it's possible, it might be an even bigger week for the team off the ice.

While Senators players have their medical testing on Wednesday and take their first official camp skates on Thursday, the club's business titans continue to close in on a deal that could be a significant step toward getting a new arena built on LeBreton Flats land, west of Parliament Hill.

On Friday, the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the hockey club and the National Capital Commission is due to expire. The NCC is the Crown corporation responsible for development, urban planning and conservation in Canada's National Capital Region.

And Saturday happens to be the one-year anniversary of Michael Andlauer's introduction as owner of the Senators, an occasion he plans to mark with a team practice in Gatineau, Que. For Andlauer, born in France and raised in Montreal by a single mom, this outreach across the Ottawa River into Gatineau is vital and indicative of a brave new world in which the Senators make their first real foray into the Outaouais region of west Quebec.

Who knows, Andlauer might have some arena news to share by then. Even if the Senators and NCC don't reach a deal by Friday's deadline,

the two sides might be close enough that a small extension could be declared in order to complete the details on a new agreement.

Any new deal would just be the first step toward actually getting a new rink done. (Spoiler alert. The Sens and the NCC have been even further down the road than this in the past, but not with Andlauer as owner, so hope springs eternal that this time it could bear fruit).

If a new agreement is pending, it might be worth reviewing how we got to this point.

Didn't the Sens already have this dance with the NCC?

Oh, yes. More than once, in fact. The Senators and the NCC have been like star-crossed lovers pushing the limits of an on-again, off-again relationship.

Arena trivia experts may recall the Senators were part of a larger development bid called RendezVous LeBreton that won preferred status in April of 2016 to build an arena, a library, 4,000 housing units plus other amenities on a 52-acre parcel of LeBreton land. Remember the fancy site plans and arena models? The Senators, led by then-owner Eugene Melnyk, were partnered with John Ruddy's Trinity Developments. Early in 2018, a more detailed agreement was in place to green-light LeBreton. Later in 2018 the entire project fell apart in a spate of lawsuits between Melnyk and Ruddy.

Why is the current land allotment for an arena so much smaller now?

When the larger-scale RendezVous LeBreton project imploded, the NCC opted to develop LeBreton on a piecemeal basis, getting a new library and other housing projects established while leaving a section for a "major event centre" if a deal could be reached for an arena in the future. A seven-acre parcel was set aside, on Albert Street between Preston and City Centre Avenue. One of the items under negotiation is the size of the site – the Senators want enough room to be able to develop a fan-friendly area near any future arena. NCC CEO Tobi Nussbaum has said there is flexibility here on the size of the parcel.

What is the existing Memorandum of Understanding?

As he did with all aspects of the Senators business, Andlauer inherited this current MOU. He basically bought the team and assumed control last fall right around the time the current MOU – signed in June of 2022 – was set to expire. And so the NCC granted the Senators a one-year extension to this Friday. More history. Melnyk died in March of 2022. It was the club's board of directors that signed off on that summer, 2022 deal. And an ensuing lease agreement was supposed to be worked out within a year. That didn't happen and it made sense, once the team went up for sale, that this arena project would have to wait for approval by the new owner.

Andlauer, by the way, has said the current MOU is "not friendly" to the Senators. His business people, including Senators alternate governors George Armoyan and Paul Paletta, plus Shawn Malholtra of Claridge Homes, are hammering out the details of a new "understanding" with the NCC.

Who would pay for the arena?

Now, there is the $64,000 question, if only $64k went very far on an arena project. Andlauer has said a new NHL rink would cost about $900 million and would require the co-operation of all three levels of government, with the hockey club paying its fair share. Whatever that might be. The Senators love the arena district setup around Rogers Place in Edmonton. Calgary also has a new deal in place to replace the existing Scotiabank Saddledome. Before you go tying Ottawa's plan to those models, consider this: Both the Oilers and Flames play in community-owned arenas. Both received massive amounts of city money because they are city venues. In contrast, the Senators play in a private arena and are very likely going to be building a private arena, albeit with an NCC lease.

How much will the federal, provincial and municipal governments contribute to this project? That remains to be seen. But Mark Sutcliffe, Ottawa's mayor, is on the record as saying there won't be a lot of city money involved, if any, for a new rink. He has said there could be other ways the city can help.

"We're ready to work with the Senators and the National Capital Commission if they strike a deal," Sutcliffe told Sportsnet.ca on Monday. "I'm excited about the prospect of the Senators being closer to downtown and I think it has the potential to be a win for everyone in the city but . . . we'll see how this plays out."

The mayor has often said he prefers a new arena right downtown, not on the fringe of downtown like LeBreton. To date, there have been no serious discussions between the city and the hockey club on arena financing.

On a scale of 1-10, what level of excitement should fans have that a new arena gets done at LeBreton?

Maybe a 6 or 7? One source compared this pending agreement to a conditional offer to buy a house. It doesn't guarantee anything. It is a step toward a new rink. It will be conditional on financing. And if it were to fall apart the way that other LeBreton ventures have collapsed, then the floor opens up to different sites and other deals. I do believe this. Having new ownership in place with a dire need to replace the 28-year-old Canadian Tire Centre rink in Kanata, a new arena WILL get built somewhere, eventually. And if a new agreement with the NCC is in place to develop on LeBreton Flats, it does mean LeBreton has the inside track. It would then be the best bet for a future venue.

Who pays for the arena? Who is responsible for removing the contaminated waste on the site? (there seems to have been progress on this front). The interests of Canada's First Nations will also be front and centre as the prospective site is on unceded Algonquin land. The NCC considers Algonquin Nation a key partner in any development initiative at LeBreton.

So, lots still to do. News this week could kick-start something positive.

As a side note, a new arena at LeBreton wouldn't just be close to existing and future Ottawa LRT hubs. It would also be closer to Gatineau residents, an important feature for the Senators owner.

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Sportsnet.ca / What to expect from Easton Cowan: Can he crack Maple Leafs' roster?

Jason Bukala

For several years the Toronto Maple Leafs have been in win-now mode and attempting to assemble a lineup capable of going on a deep playoff run. Their regular season record over the past eight seasons is an impressive 356-188-74. The organization has a firm belief in its core players and has attempted to surround them with players who can assist with getting the team over the playoff hump.

But, as everyone in Leafs Nation is aware, the Buds have not met expectations at the hardest time of the year and have only been victorious in one playoff round over the past eight years.

The organization has sacrificed a ton of draft capital in that time to get players via trade and build what they believed would provide the group their best chance of contending for a Stanley Cup. At the 2021, 2022 and 2023 drafts the Leafs selected a grand total of 11 prospects.

That meant the scouting staff had been able to make only one first-round selection in those drafts — the 28th-overall pick in 2023. They used it to take London Knights forward Easton Cowan, which was a surprise pick at the time. Fast forward to today, though, and it looks like Cowan is going to make it hard on the Leafs brass to send him back to major junior in 2024-25.

COWAN'S COMPLETE GAME SHOULD TRANSLATE TO THE NHL

What I like most about Cowan's overall approach is that he isn't a one trick pony. His offensive statistics stand out, but what I describe as his "B" game is what gives Cowan a chance at earning an NHL roster spot in the coming weeks.

The NHL game is very different from major junior or college. The players are obviously bigger, stronger, faster and more detailed with their approach in all three zones. A prospect has to be able to skate at NHL

pace, think the game quickly and efficiently, and most importantly approach each shift with relentless compete.

Cowan produced 34 goals and 62 assists in 54 regular-season games last season and followed it up with 10 goals and 24 assists in 18 playoff games. But it's his overall approach — the "B" game I mentioned — that impresses me most. His speed, hockey IQ and compete level is what provides him the opportunity to produce offence. Cowan doesn't cut corners defensively. He's the kind of forward who can match up versus top-six opponents, be deployed on the penalty kill, block shots, and force turnovers with his tenacity and physicality.

Here's a couple of samples from last year in London:

The first clip is from a game versus the Flint Firebirds. Cowan attacks with pace, chips the puck deep and bodies his man as F1 on the forecheck. His teammates were late on the scene to support, which left Cowan to read that his responsibility was to retreat high in the zone and keep the play in front of him in case he had to assist defensively.

The second clip is an example that shows Cowan being deployed on the penalty kill late in the first period in a playoff game versus the Kitchener Rangers. He starts the sequence by protecting his crease before moving out to block a shot in the last minute of the frame.

I witnessed these kinds of sacrifices throughout the year from Cowan.

ANALYZING HIS OFFENSIVE GAME AND HOW IT FITS IN WITH THE LEAFS

Cowan's offensive statistics are what most people will notice right away. He's a play driver off the rush, isn't shy about taking pucks to the net when he gets the lane, and is very difficult to defend in small areas with his agility and puck skill.

Here's a look at how efficient he was directing pucks on net, especially from high danger areas in the middle of the offensive zone. The percentages reflect his accuracy at getting pucks to the net and forcing his opponent to make a save.

Cowan attempted 497 total shots last season, with 320 of them ending up on target (64.3 per cent). He's accurate at getting pucks to the net to create offence and he scored on 13.75 per cent of his shots on goal, regular season and playoffs combined.

It's interesting to note the majority of Cowan's goals came from the middle or weak side of the offensive zone. The only reason I point this out is due to the fact the Leafs have potential openings on left wing, but Cowan was clearly more comfortable directing pucks on net from the right side of the offensive zone.

ANALYZING USAGE

Cowan suited up for the OHL Knights and Team Canada at the world juniors last season. He was trusted in a variety of roles up and down the lineup. Here's the breakdown of how he was deployed:

Average time on ice: 21:11

Power-Play Time Per Game: 3:38

Penalty-Kill Time Per Game: 2:40

Shots per game: 6

Shots on goal %: 65

Face-off percentage: 45

Average puck battles per game: 14

Defensive zone starts: 34%

Neutral zone starts: 32%

Offensive zone starts: 34%

The fact his coaches have identified Cowan as a player who can be counted on in a wide range of roles should give the Leafs options when forecasting the role he plays early in his NHL career.

Cowan isn't the kind of prospect who has to slot into the Toronto's top six forward lines immediately, although he will in time.

ABILITY TO TAKE FACEOFFS

Cowan is a winger, but he has been called upon to take key draws at the junior level and the chart below displays his level of success. Cowan is a left shot, so note how much more proficient he is taking draws on his strong side (back hand).

WHAT ARE HIS CHANCES TO MAKE THE LEAFS OUT OF CAMP?

Cowan will be competing against Nick Roberston, Calle Järnkrok, Ryan Reaves and Max Pacioretty for a roster spot. The Leafs are in search of a left winger, but Cowan can play both sides, and therein lies the competition for a roster spot.

Cowan is ready for the pro game and might even end up as a full-time NHL player this season. Or, he could suit up for nine games without burning a year on his contract and get sent back to the London Knights.

Either way, he's a glowing example of a player who could use time in the AHL this year and be available for recall when injuries hit, but the rules don't allow junior players his age to go to the minors. It's going to be very interesting to see how the next few weeks play out.

Cowan burst on to the scene in the second half of his draft year and hasn't looked back. He's ready to compete for an NHL roster slot right now and I would be giving him every opportunity to do so.

The Leafs will have some tough decisions to make regarding Cowan's next path in his development.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames Training Camp Preview: Goalie situation unresolved, as is blue line

Eric Francis

CALGARY — Craig Conroy is thrilled that after two years of relative turmoil, his club will enter training camp without excessive distractions.

The Flames will also enter camp without a proven starting goalie or a clear picture on how the defensive personnel in front of the net will shape up.

The retool in Calgary turned into a rebuild this summer when Conroy added Jacob Markstrom to the long list of cornerstone veterans swapped out for futures.

What's left in town are a handful of experienced leaders who will insulate some of the up-and-comers as they find their way on a team that will be in tough to stay in a playoff race.

"It just feels like there's a lot of excitement about just getting started because when you have young guys in there and the veteran guys feel good, it's like, 'OK, this is what we're gonna do: We're gonna show people,'" said the Flames GM.

"We don't have one or two guys that are going to do it. We're going to have to be 20-strong every night, and in there together.

"Camp is going to be a challenge, but very exciting because you have all these questions about chemistry, who will play with who and the goalie battle. But the young guys are jacked and there's real positive vibe with the veterans."

Will Dan Vladar and/or Dustin Wolf be able to step up as effective NHL regulars?

Will the team be able to determine which of its wingers is capable of becoming a prominent NHL centre?

Which youngsters step up in camp to prove they are worthy of stealing jobs?

Who will play alongside Rasmus Andersson on the team's top defensive pairing, and will the revamped blue line include Tyson Barrie, who is auditioning on a PTO?

How effectively the team comes together and fills holes will set the tone for an organization that will attempt to straddle the line between rebuilding while trying to remain competitive.

Salary cap space: $19.97 million

GM: Craig Conroy

Head coach: Ryan Huska

Assistant coaches: Cail Maclean, Brad Larsen, Dan Lambert

Unsigned players: Cole Schwindt, Nikita Okhotyuk

Key additions: Anthony Mantha, Kevin Bahl, Ryan Lomberg, Devin Cooley, Jarred Tinordi

Key subtractions: Andrew Mangiapane, Oliver Kylington, Jacob Markstrom

PTOs: Tyson Barrie

CAMP BATTLES

Starting goalie: With Markstrom's departure, the door is wide open for either Dustin Wolf or Dan Vladar to stake their claim as the starter in what will likely evolve into a 1A/1B scenario.

Vladar is pain-free for the first time in two years following hip surgery, but needs to prove to himself and others he's fully healthy.

The 27-year-old has 75 NHL games under his belt and will never get a better chance to prove he can carry the load for an organization that will otherwise trade the pending UFA at the deadline.

He's shown in spurts he can do the job, but consistency is needed to earn more starts than Wolf.

Wolf is the goalie of the future, and at age 23 will be given every opportunity to prove he's ready for regular NHL action.

The AHL hotshot played 17 games last season, winning his last four starts.

With just six NHL appearances, Devin Cooley is destined to start in the AHL this season.

The problem for all three is their auditions will come with a younger, revamped blue line corps in front of them than the team had last year.

Young Stars Classic Highlights: Canucks 4, Flames 3

Can Matt Coronato break through to become an everyday NHLer? A gifted offensive threat with a heavy shot, the Flames' first rounder in 2021 was unable to stick with the big club after making the opening night roster.

In the minors he scored 15 goals and played at a point-a-game pace for 41 outings while working on his board battles and defensive proficiency.

Coach Ryan Huska said it is up to Coronato to steal a job, which means he'll have to displace one of the team's top three right wingers — a tough task only made possible if he has a stellar pre-season like the one he had last year.

Who is going to play with Rasmus Andersson on the top pairing, and will Tyson Barrie earn a contract? With the loss of Noah Hanifin, Chris Tanev and Nikita Zadorov from last season, the Flames' new-look blue line will be decidedly younger.

Huska told Sportsnet he likes MacKenzie Weegar on the left side, playing with Daniil Miromanov.

That means it will be an open audition to see who will play on Andersson's left side.

Kevin Bahl, who was acquired in the Markstrom trade, will likely be battling free-agent signing Jake Bean for the gig.

One of them will be relegated to third pairing duties with either Bayden Pachal or Barrie, the 33-year-old who will be in camp on a PTO.

ONE PRESSING QUESTION

Who will play up the middle?

Nazem Kadri, Mikael Backlund and Kevin Rooney are fixtures at centre for an organization woefully short on middle-men.

Who will round out the group?

Huska will move one of his top young wingers to centre, meaning camp will feature open auditions from his three top candidates: Martin Pospišil, Connor Zary and Yegor Sharangovich.

Huska made it clear to Sportsnet on the weekend the favourite is Pospišil, whose size, speed and tenacity could make for a perfect fit. The Slovakian revelation followed up his shocking NHL debut last season by starring at centre with the national team at the worlds. He then played in the middle while helping his country qualify for the Olympics.

He considers himself a natural centre, as does Zary.

Zary finished last season playing up the middle and could be a fit if he's able to play his possession game at the most crucial position of all skaters.

Sharangovich filled in admirably up the middle after Elias Lindholm was traded, but flourished more as a winger.

PROJECTED LINEUP

Forwards

Zary – Backlund - Coleman

Kuzmenko – Kadri – Sharangovich

Huberdeau – Pospisil – Mantha

Lomberg — Rooney - Pelletier

Extras – Coronato, Hunt, Duehr

Defence

Weegar – Miromanov

Bahl – Andersson

Bean – Pachal/Barrie

Extras – Solovyov, Hanley, Tinordi

Goalie

Vladar

Wolf

Extra – Cooley

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks Training Camp Preview: Amid good times, reasons to be nervous

Iain MacIntyre

PENTICTON, B.C. — For the first time in many years, the Vancouver Canucks open training camp on Thursday with something more solid than hope to stand on.

The team is coming off a 50-win, 109-point season that ended with a playoff loss against the Edmonton Oilers in Game 7 of the second round of the Stanley Cup tournament. It was the Canucks' most successful season since 2011 and, from a fans' standpoint, one of the most joyous in franchise history, arriving after a dismal eight-season stretch that saw Vancouver make the playoffs just once.

But even in good times, hope in Canucks Nation is always counterbalanced by the dread of impending doom. And for the skittish, there are certainly some reasons to be nervous ahead of this season.

Star goalie Thatcher Demko has spent the entire summer recovering from injury — or injuries — and is not expected to be fully fit for the start of camp. Leading goal-scorer Brock Boeser is healthy after blood clots forced him to miss Game 7 last May, and the winger said last week he will need to be “careful.”

There were the free-agent losses of playoff warriors Nikita Zadorov and Elias Lindholm, although general manager Patrik Allvin offset those with an impressive haul of his own, signing two defencemen and four wingers, including Jake DeBrusk to skate alongside $92.8-million centre Elias Pettersson.

The biggest immediate threat to the Canucks, however, is complacency (or naivety) in dealing with success — a first in Vancouver for the team’s formidable core players.

This is where the influx of a half-dozen experienced, proven National Hockey League players should help. The newcomers will give training camp a freshness, and be part of a fierce competition for roles and playing time up and down a lineup that, up front, may be as deep and talented as it has even been.

“When you smell there's opportunity, I want to see somebody take that opportunity,” head coach Rick Tocchet said of the competition for assignments. “You might have four guys that are doing really well, so that makes my job even harder. Sh--, who do I pick? What I like is the depth, for sure.”

The Canucks also have a handful of players they feel are ready to graduate from the American Hockey League and push for spots in Vancouver, even if there appears to be almost no vacancies on the NHL roster.

“If you're good enough, you're going to be on the roster,” forward prospect Aatu Raty said. “It's a winning business. They want to win games, so if they think you’re better than someone else, you’re definitely going to be there.”

The Canucks need to make sure business keeps flourishing.

Salary cap space: $191k (no LTIR)

GM: Patrik Allvin

Head coach: Rick Tocchet

Assistant coaches: Adam Foote, Yogi Svejkovsky, Sergei Gonchar, Marko Torenius

Unsigned players: None

Key additions: Jake DeBrusk, Danton Heinen, Kiefer Sherwood, Daniel Sprong, Derek Forbort, Vincent Desharnais

Key subtractions: Elias Lindholm, Nikita Zadorov, Ian Cole, Ilya Mikheyev, Sam Lafferty, Vasily Podkolzin, Casey DeSmith

PTOs: Sammy Blais, Dylan Ferguson

It's become clear that Canucks signed DeBrusk to play with Pettersson

CAMP BATTLES

WING DINGERS

OK, so let’s understand the arithmetic on this: with four forward lines in an NHL lineup, there are a maximum of eight wingers playing on any night. And the Canucks signed free-agent wingers DeBrusk, Danton Heinen, Kiefer Sherwood and Daniel Sprong, and retained incumbents Conor Garland, Dakota Joshua, Nils Hoglander and Boeser. That makes eight. So if the Canucks are healthy through training camp and the pre-season, there are about zero jobs up for grabs among wingers.

But there are roles at stake. Tocchet needs to find a first-line winger to accompany J.T. Miller and Boeser. He also needs a partner for DeBrusk and Pettersson on the new second line. And which reasonably offensively accomplished wingers (Hoglander had 24 goals last season, Sprong scored 18 and Heinen 17) will be pushed to the fourth line?

The battles for forward roles and ice time will be the most watched at camp.

'Exceptional skill level': Canucks' Malhotra on prospect Lekkerimaki

LUCKY 13

Jostling among the top 12 forwards may be nothing compared to the battle royale cage match to be the 13th man. Third-year centre Nils Aman and veteran Phil DiGiuseppe appear to be front-runners to be first in line if there’s an injury. But Canucks president Jim Rutherford said elite prospect Jonathan Lekkerimaki will be given the opportunity to make the team, young minor-leaguers Arshdeep Bains and Linus Karlsson already have NHL games on their resumes, and Allvin has said other AHL players Max Sasson and Raty are ready to challenge for a place on the Canucks. No wonder the GM traded 23-year-old depth forward Vasily Podkolzin, a former first-round pick who has played 137 NHL games, to the Edmonton Oilers in August. The organization had to offer some hope to the many players straining to make the NHL roster.

WHO IS JIRI PATERA?

The free-agent signing of minor-league goalie Jiri Patera drew attention in Vancouver mostly for what it signalled: the Canucks’ belief that they can go with a Thatcher Demko-Arturs Silovs tandem in net this season. But not only has Demko’s uncertain status (there may be clarity after physicals on Wednesday) been a pre-camp drama, but Silovs missed Latvia’s Olympic qualifying games in August due to sore ligaments in his knee. So, who is Jiri Patera?

The six-foot-three, 24-year-old Czech is on a two-way contract and spent the last four seasons in the Vegas Golden Knights’ system. Patera has appeared in eight NHL games. Let the scrutiny begin.

Is Demko's health and Canucks goalie depth a concern ahead of season?

ONE PRESSING QUESTION

When will Demko be healthy and will he stay that way?

The summer’s biggest news item for the Canucks after free agency was confirmation that Demko is not fully fit and may not be for the start of the regular season. There is a tonne of mystery surrounding the Vezina Trophy runner-up's injury — whether it is the same one he sustained in Game 1 of the playoffs, and whether he underwent summer surgery. But whatever the answers, the situation is unsettling. Even if he’s healthy for the start of the season (or even training camp), can he stay that way?

The last time Demko underwent off-season knee surgery that was supposed to be “routine,” in the summer of 2022, his form went over a cliff that autumn before the goalie tore a groin muscle that kept him out for two months in the middle of the season. Demko was spectacular upon his return, but it was too late to save the Canucks.

In four years as an NHL starter, including the pandemic season when COVID decimated the Canucks, Demko has yet to physically survive an entire campaign. So any deficit in his health is disconcerting. Even with the emergence in the playoffs last spring of Silovs, Demko is essential to the Canucks if they are to repeat or eclipse last season’s success.

ONE MORE THING

Operating in a salary-cap straight jacket since he took over as manager 2 1/2 years ago, Allvin has worked relentlessly to restructure the lineup and rescue the Canucks from long-term injured reserve. Allvin may finally have some cap flexibility this season and be able to accumulate spending space ahead of the trade deadline. Sending winger Ilya Mikheyev and his $4.75-million cap hit to the Chicago Blackhawks, among other moves, allows the Canucks to remove long-injured defenceman Tucker Poolman and his $2.5-million cap charge from LTIR. For now. But that space may be awfully tempting to spend if another offensive forward or established depth defenceman becomes available before the regular season. Or the Canucks need another goalie. Stay tuned.

PROJECTED LINEUP

Forward lines

Danton Heinen-J.T. Miller-Brock Boeser

Nils Hoglander-Elias Pettersson-Jake DeBrusk

Dakota Joshua-Pius Suter-Conor Garland

Kiefer Sherwood-Teddy Blueger-Daniel Sprong

Phil Di Giuseppe

Defence pairings

Quinn Hughes-Filip Hronek

Carson Soucy-Tyler Myers

Derek Forbort-Vincent Desharnais

Noah Juulsen

Goalies

Thatcher Demko

Arturs Silovs

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1320530 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs Training Camp Preview: Battles, questions, projected roster

Luke Fox

TORONTO -- Everything was on the table, they said.

Including running it all back, apparently.

Yes, the Toronto Maple Leafs' biggest off-season changes after another early playoff exit — the core's post-season series record sits at 1-8 — were behind the bench or largely symbolic, as Auston Matthews supplants John Tavares as captain.

No trades.

No cuts to a core that has underachieved by everyone's measure, including their own.

A few veteran blueliners were lost to free agency, and a couple better ones were recruited to log top-four minutes.

A goaltender with questionable dependency as a starter was replaced by a goaltender with questionable dependency as a starter.

The forward group took a hit with the removal of Tyler Bertuzzi, but there is hope that a younger, cheaper committee of wingers can replace his offence.

"All that stuff is going to sort itself out at camp," GM Brad Treliving says. "What we're trying to do is make our roster as deep as possible. I think there's going to be lots of people pushing for jobs."

'A true honour': Matthews humbled to be named Maple Leafs captain

Mostly, though, it's more of the familiar (but legit) talent and familiar (but legit) skepticism.

Change, then, must come through culture, coaching, and consistency.

"It's a lot of the same group that we've had," Mitch Marner said this summer, with an eye toward training camp. Same faces, same expectations.

"We know we're a great team, and it's just about making sure every single summer, you put the work in, and you get ready to go and get geared up for the new one."

Salary cap space: –$1.07 million

GM: Brad Treliving

Head coach: Craig Berube

Assistant coaches: Lane Lambert, Marc Savard, Mike Van Ryn, Curtis Sanford (goaltending)

Unsigned players: None

Key additions: Chris Tanev, Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Anthony Stolarz, Jani Hakanpää

Key subtractions: Tyler Bertuzzi, Ilya Samsonov, T.J. Brodie, Ilya Lyubushkin, Joel Edmundson, Mark Giordano, Noah Gregor, John Klingberg, Martin Jones

PTOs: Max Pacioretty, Steven Lorentz

CAMP BATTLES

First-line left wing: Bertuzzi's tour of the Original Six shipped out of Toronto and set sail for Chicago, leaving a gaping hole atop the left-wing depth chart. With no outside solution a slam-dunk (we see you, reenergized Max Pacioretty), the answer will unfold over time. Can Matthew Knies build on a promising playoff showing and snatch an every-night role alongside his fellow Arizonan? Does Berube throw a veteran like Max Domi or Calle Järnkrok up top? Or does Nick Robertson flip a trade request into a top-six spot? Bertuzzi's old minutes need a new home, and there should be plenty of internal competition for them.

Jani Hakanpaa vs. his knee: The rugged right-shot defenceman was said — by Treliving no less — to be joining the Maple Leafs as a free agent on July 1. Yet his contract wasn't formalized until Sept. 11 because the former Dallas Star has a concerning knee issue. If the 32-year-old veteran is healthy enough to play and the number-crunchers can tuck his contract under the ceiling, he could bolster a mediocre penalty kill and give youngsters like Simon Benoit and Timothy Liljegren some competition to stick in the lineup every night.

Bottom-six forwards: Bertuzzi's departure combined with a handful of intriguing prospects (Easton Cowan, Fraser Minten, Nikita Grebyonkin) and eager fringe forwards (Alex Steeves, Steven Lorentz) should stir plenty of debate over who is most deserving to make the cut. Surely, salary-cap constraints and waiver eligibility will come into play here, and we could see a surprise add to the bottom six. Remember when Treliving traded Sam Lafferty to free up a spot for camp star Minten a year ago?

ONE PRESSING QUESTION

Where does Marner go from here?

With Leon Draisaitl all locked up to the max and Sidney Crosby's next extension signed, Marner is positioning himself as the most intriguing UFA of the class of 2025.

Armed with a full no-move clause and sharpened by summer skates alongside Nathan MacKinnon, Marner and agent Darren Ferris appear content to play this thing out. And who would be surprised if a healthy Marner, like William Nylander before him, exploded with his most productive NHL campaign yet?

Following another underwhelming post-season, Treliving isn't rushing to hand over the bag just yet. (The request will start with, what, a 12?) And it will be fascinating to see how Marner performs under Berube — his fellow paparazzi target.

Marner 'ready to go' for next season, but quiet on Maple Leafs future

"That one was pretty funny to get out. It's a little coffee shop in Etobicoke, and there's only a couple people in there," Marner says.

"Talking with Craig throughout the summer, he's been amazing. He's bringing a great new mindset to the team. I've talked to a lot of people that have been under his coaching, and I've only heard great things."

Leafs Nation is demanding great things from its well-compensated core.

How Marner conducts himself on the ice and at the negotiating table this season will not only affect his future but will determine how committed management is to sticking with its top-heavy construction.

PROJECTED LINEUP

Forwards

Knies – Matthews – Nylander

Pacioretty – Tavares – Marner

McMann – Domi – Järnkrok

Robertson – Kämpf – Reaves

Defence

Rielly – Tanev

Ekman-Larsson – Liljegren

McCabe – Hakanpaa

Goalies

Woll

Stolarz

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets Training Camp Preview: Can Winnipeg take that next step?

Ryan Dixon

It's not quite deja vu all over again for the Winnipeg Jets, but — just like 12 months ago — there's an air of uncertainty around the team as it prepares to open training camp ahead of the 2024-25 season.

In 2023, two monster contract situations hung over the club as stud goalie Connor Hellebuyck and No. 1 centre Mark Scheifele entered camp on expiring deals. While we all wondered if they'd eventually depart as UFAs or be traded before that could happen, GM Kevin Cheveldayoff emphatically answered all questions on the eve of the season by inking both to monster, eight-year extensions.

So while the situations of restricted free agent Cole Perfetti and pending-UFA Nik Ehlers may seem like small potatoes relative to last year's speculation, their contract issues still very much colour the conversation around a Jets squad coming off an impressive 110-point campaign.

The status of Ehlers and Perfetti can obscure the fact this team will have its fourth head coach since the start of the 2021-22 season, as Scott Arniel takes the reins from retired veteran Rick Bowness. It's easy to say Arniel's job will be getting the Jets deeper in the playoffs — Winnipeg was bounced in Round 1 last season by the Colorado Avalanche and has made the second round just once since 2018 — but first things first; just getting into the top eight clubs in the West again will be a serious ask for a Winnipeg squad that has to deal with Colorado, Dallas and a loaded-up Nashville Predators team just in its own Central Division.

Of course, the fact Cheveldayoff did get Scheifele and Hellebuyck inked one year ago means there are still two strong pillars in place, especially the baseline support provided by last year's Vezina Trophy winner in the crease.

When coach Paul Maurice — who spent close to a decade in Winnipeg — won the Stanley Cup with Florida last year, he hadn't even departed the confetti-covered ice before looking into a Sportsnet camera and saying, now that he had his title, he hoped the Jets got theirs.

Maurice dedicates Stanley Cup win to dad: 'Going up with your heroes'

It's a wonderful thought, but there's a lot of work to be done between here and there.

Salary cap space: $5,776,309

GM: Kevin Cheveldayoff

Head coach: Scott Arniel

Assistant coaches: Marty Johnston, Davis Payne, Dean Chynoweth

Unsigned players: Cole Perfetti

Key additions: Eric Comrie, Kaapo Kahkonen, Brayden Yager

Key subtractions: Sean Monahan, Tyler Toffoli, Brenden Dillon, Laurent Brossoit, Nate Schmidt, Rutger McGroarty

PTOs: None

CAMP BATTLES

Second-line spots: Sean Monahan seemed like a nice fit at 2C for the Jets, notching 24 points in 34 contests with the team after arriving from Montreal in a swap just before the All-Star Game. However, Columbus jumped up and offered Monahan — who has an extensive injury history and turns 30 in less than a month — a five-year, $27.5-million UFA contract. His departure leaves a clear need for a second-line pivot, which is likely what both the team and Perfetti hope he can eventually be. With Perfetti's contract status — and playing potential — still an unknown, though, Winnipeg will likely go with imperfect in-house options. That means bumping up natural bottom-sixers like Adam Lowry and Vladimir Namestnikov to the second unit.

One wild card to consider is Brad Lambert. The 20-year-old Finn had a strong rookie season in the AHL last year and, if he lights it up in the pre-season, could push his way into a scoring role with this club.

'I'm an old fart now': Scheifele excited to see growth from young Jets

Backup goalie: Hellebuyck may be the best in the business, but he wasn't the only puckstopping savant in Manitoba last year. Laurent Brossoit had the highest save percentage (.927) of any goalie in the NHL who played at least 20 games. He parlayed that showing into a tasty UFA contract with the Chicago Blackhawks, leaving a hole in Winnipeg's crease. Enter old friend Eric Comrie, whose best NHL showing came two years ago when he posted a .920 save percentage in Winnipeg before a couple years of scuffling in Buffalo.

The Jets also signed Kaapo Kahkonen, who's been pelted with pucks the past few seasons while playing for the lowly San Jose Sharks. Kahkonen actually had a .923 save percentage in a short, six-game stay with the New Jersey Devils at the end of last season and was a .907 goalie in 54 games at the start of his NHL run in Minnesota.

Defence: Brenden Dillon's departure as a UFA this past summer is a ding, but righty Colin Miller — acquired from the Devils at last year's trade deadline — did stick around on a new two-year contract and will be a presence on the third pair. Last fall, 2019 first-rounder Ville Heinola was dealt a huge blow when he broke his ankle in a pre-season contest. The heady Finn returned to play half the AHL season with the Manitoba Moose and may finally be ready to push his way onto the big club for good five years after being taken 20th overall.

ONE PRESSING QUESTION

It's easy to say Perfetti's predicament is the most pressing because he won't be at camp until he signs a new deal. If you were to put a nickel down, though, it still seems his situation will be resolved well before opening night versus Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers on Oct. 9.

The real intrigue is how things play out with Ehlers.

Speaking at the team's annual golf tournament on Monday, Ehlers said his representation did talk turkey with the organization over the summer, but didn't exactly sound like a guy who was on the verge of putting pen to paper on a deal that would extend the marriage between player and team.

"I'm at the same point that I was at the exit meetings," he told reporters. "I have nothing new to tell. There's obviously a reason I've been here for nine years, but, again, there's nothing new to tell."

Cheveldayoff has a long history of taking situations that don't seem favourable for the Jets and finding good — and, in some cases, very good — solutions for the team. He didn't get jumpy with Hellebuyck and Scheifele and both wound up signing long-term deals. He's traded disgruntled players like Jacob Trouba and Pierre-Luc Dubois for strong returns in the past. And, just a few weeks ago, he sent prospect Rutger McGroarty — a 2022 first-rounder who did not intend on signing an entry-level deal with Winnipeg — to Pittsburgh for another first-round talent in Brayden Yager.

'Chevy' has come through before, so whether it's finding common ground with Ehlers or recouping a good return for a 28-year-old pending-UFA with 30-goal potential, the GM has earned the benefit of the doubt.

PROJECTED LINEUP

Forwards

Kyle-Connor - Mark Scheifele - Gabe Vilardi

Nik Ehlers - Adam Lowry - Alex Iafallo

Nino Niederreiter - Vladimir Namestnikov - Mason Appleton

Morgan Barron - David Gustafsson - Rasmus Kupari

Axel Jonsson-Fjallby

Defence

Josh Morrissey - Dylan DeMelo

Dylan Samberg - Neal Pionk

Ville Heinola - Colin Miller

Logan Stanley

Goalie

Connor Helleybuck

Eric Comrie

Kaapo Kahkonen

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens Training Camp Preview: Battle for jobs set to be fierce out of gate

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — The Montreal Canadiens are beginning their quest to get out of the bottom rung of the NHL standings, to make a push towards a playoff picture they've been absent from for three seasons, and they have to get off on the right foot.

Injuries hobbled them before each of the last three campaigns begun but, for the first time in a long time, the Canadiens are coming into camp with virtually everyone angling for a job at full health.

That can only help.

Fringe winger Rafael Harvey-Pinard will miss the whole thing as he continues to rehab an off-season leg fracture, but everyone else (pending Wednesday's physicals), is ready to go, setting the table for what should be an uber-competitive audition for the season to come.

We don't know if it'll be a successful season for the Canadiens, but it's shaping up to be an exciting one.

As one executive put it to us over this past weekend, "One thing the Canadiens won't be is boring."

The intrigue is already palpable, with Patrik Laine's arrival in an August trade with the Columbus Blue Jackets bolstering the top-six forward group and three rookie defencemen fighting for jobs on a more seasoned defence corps than the Canadiens have carried over the last two seasons.

Laine 'super excited' to have Canadiens fans on his side for once

The team is more mature in general, with its hard-working identity now established and its fast-paced system already fully implemented by head coach Martin St. Louis.

When he said on Monday, from the Canadiens' season-opening golf tournament in Laval, that the team certainly wasn't starting from scratch, it resonated. There was very little turnover on the roster over the off-season and everyone who's been there over the last couple of years knows exactly what's expected of them.

Those players — like Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield, Mike Matheson, Kaiden Guhle, Juraj Slafkovsky and Arber Xhekaj, among others — feel ready to take their respective games to the next level. And all the ones we spoke to at the golf tournament Monday expressed their excitement about the vibe around the team.

It appears to be more upbeat than it's been in recent memory.

Now the Canadiens must channel that vibe accordingly to make the necessary progress they need in order to propel this rebuild forward.

That's how general manager Kent Hughes sees it.

"I think we have a competitive group, we have a positive group," Hughes said on Monday. "They believe in their own ability individually and collectively and we're certainly not going to in any way try to dampen their expectations. That's for them to push, and, as the season progresses, I'm sure if they're having success they'll be more optimistic."

That drive begins right now, well before the real games get going in October.

The battle for jobs — on the second line, third line, fourth line and blue line — will be fierce out of the gate, and we can't wait for it to start.

'A lot to be excited about': St. Louis can't wait to get after it

Salary cap space: -$2.02 million

GM: Kent Hughes

Head coach: Martin St. Louis

Assistant coaches: Trevor Letowski, Stephane Robidas

Unsigned players: None

Key additions: Patrik Laine

Key subtractions: Jordan Harris, Johnathan Kovacevic

PTOs: None

CAMP BATTLES

• Blueline jobs

In 17 years covering the Canadiens, we haven't seen a crazier battle than what we're about to potentially witness at this camp. Matheson and Guhle are guaranteed their spots at the top and David Savard is likely to be anchoring the second pair from the right side, but everything else is in flux. Arber Xhekaj, Justin Barron and Jayden Struble start off ahead just based on experience, but Lane Hutson, Logan Mailloux, David Reinbacher and even Adam Engstrom are all knocking on the door. It won't be a surprise to see all of them play games at this level over the course of the season, but only three of eight will dress on opening night against the Maple Leafs. Everyone brings something different to the mix, but we'll see who brings their best right out of the gate.

• Second-line winger

Alex Newhook probably has the edge in this competition to play alongside Kirby Dach and Patrik Laine, but Joshua Roy, Josh Anderson, Brendan Gallagher and Joel Armia will all be pushing for the opportunity. Chances are all of them will get a chance — not only in this camp, but also at one point or another during the season — but only one of them will start there. For Newhook, who's a capable centre that's versatile enough to be as effective from the wing, the pressure is on him to keep his place. Barring an injury to Christian Dvorak, who's the only other left-handed centreman on the team to have filled a middle-six role at this level, it is the place he looks like he belongs in. But Newhook will have to prove that with a strong camp, especially with those guys pushing behind him.

Why Canadiens' Gorton is most excited for roster spot battle at camp

• Power play 1

St. Louis may ultimately seek to balance out his units — especially considering he only had one good one to work with a season ago — but it's hard to imagine there being equal opportunity here. It's a given that Suzuki will be on the top unit, but nothing else feels guaranteed. Could Matheson's spot as the quarterback be seized by Hutson? Who out of Caufield and Laine gets the left half wall? If both Caufield and Laine end up on the first unit, what does that mean for Slafkovsky? And who serves as the top bumper between Dach and Newhook? Expect there to be a lot of testing here in camp, but this is ultimately going to be a season-long competition.

• Third-/fourth-line centre: Dvorak's experience in the middle six doesn't guarantee him a spot there out of camp. Jake Evans has to be thinking

about pushing him right out of it, and Alex Barre-Boulet and Owen Beck will be angling to knock either Evans or Dvorak right out of the lineup. There may not be a lot of buzz about this battle right now, but that could change in an instant over the coming weeks.

ONE PRESSING QUESTION

It isn't a big one, but the Canadiens are currently over the cap and people are surely curious as to how they'll resolve that.

The most likely scenario is they'll place Rafael Harvey-Pinard on long-term injured reserve and clear roughly $1.1 million to be cap compliant by Day 1 of the season by papering a roster player or two to the AHL before recalling them, taking Harvey-Pinard off LTIR and placing Carey Price on LTIR.

It's not guaranteed that's how the Canadiens will do it, but it's one of a few different ways they can easily solve the problem.

PROJECTED LINEUP

Forwards

Cole Caufield - Nick Suzuki - Juraj Slafkovsky

Alex Newhook - Kirby Dach - Patrik Laine

Joshua Roy - Christian Dvorak - Joel Armia

Brendan Gallagher - Jake Evans - Josh Anderson

Extra: Michael Pezzetta

Notes:

The third and fourth lines are interchangeable in our eyes, as we expect they'll be allotted relatively equal ice-time unless one needs to be used more than the other on a given night due to their role. The Dvorak line is set to be a possession line, while the Evans line is set to be an energy-forechecking line. There doesn't appear to be much hierarchy here if St. Louis is setting them up this way.

Defence

Mike Matheson - Kaiden Guhle

Lane Hutson - David Savard

Arber Xhekaj - Logan Mailloux

Extra: Jayden Struble - Justin Barron

Notes:

We have the Canadiens carrying a 13th forward and eight defencemen.

Goaltenders

Samuel Montembeault

Cayden Primeau

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